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THE NEW WORLD OF THE THEATRE

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THE NEW WORLD OF THE THEATRE

1923–1924

BY

J. T. GREIN

WITH A PREFACE BY

G. K. CHESTERTON

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TO

CAPTAIN BRUCE INGRAM

MY EDITOR AND MY FRIEND, WHO HAS PERMITTED ME TO REPRINT MY WEEKLY SURVEY OF THE WORLD OF THE THEATRE IN THE *ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS*, I DEDICATE THIS VOLUME OF ESSAYS ON PEOPLE, PLAYS AND PHASES, FOR REMEMBRANCE AND IN SINCERE APPRECIATION OF FIVE YEARS' HAPPY CO-OPERATION.

J. T. G.

London,
October 1, 1924.

PREFACE

I FEAR I have very little right to the privilege of introducing, or rather re-introducing, the distinguished dramatic critic who has written these criticisms to the public which knows him quite well already. Compared with the writer of this book, and even with most of the readers of it, I know very little about the theatre or about plays in general. I have only written one play; and I know even less about that. I regard it with that sort of panic-stricken agnosticism with which a man often regards his one intervention in a world he does not understand; I felt disposed to desert it on a doorstep or to use the traditional plea that it was a very little one. In the case of Mr. Grein, on the other hand, it is obvious that a great part of the admirable ease and variety of his essays comes from the confidence of long familiarity with his subject. I can only claim to associate myself with him on the common ground of journalism rather than drama. Despite my sense of incompetence, I feel I cannot decline the compliment offered me by a colleague who has worked so long and so effectively on the same periodical as myself, the oldest publication of its kind in England, the *Illustrated London News*, in which he has written every week about something and I about nothing in particular. I can only plead that, little as I can estimate his judgment of plays, I have some right to form a judgment of articles; and this, as the pushing commercial gentleman would say, is a very good article indeed.

Dramatic criticism, like drama, covers a bewildering

multiplicity of subjects. There is no subject about which a modern writer may not write a play, especially if it is a bad play. There is no aspect from which a critic cannot regard it; and he is generally able to make a very good article out of a very bad play. One great advantage which Mr. Grein possesses for this task is his range; I mean the breadth of his power of comparison through a knowledge of the contemporary and especially the continental world. To mention but one thing out of a hundred, he understands something of what may be called the secret simplicities of the old and central civilisation of Paris or Rome; the simplicities that have puzzled us much more than the subtleties. He knows that Napoleon was really fond of his mother; that the Frenchman is not attitudinising before the maternal tomb; that Sarah Bernhardt was not necessarily insincere when she tried abruptly in private to be a "womanly woman." Even the cult of glory in Napoleon and in Bernhardt was a mark not only of simplicity but of sincerity. For the Latin tradition calls glory, glory; while the Teutonic tradition would call it master-morality of the evolution of a higher type. I think it due to Mr. Grein to emphasise his comprehension of this; because he is sometimes classed with the more or less cynical æsthetes of *l'art pour l'art* who were always offering us a sparkling and artificial frost as the French culture. But in truth the decadent for whom Paris meant *l'art pour l'art* was about as superficial as the tourist for whom it meant Gay Paree. Mr. Grein is naturally detached about some things on which I should be dogmatic; and his standards and traditions are not always mine; but he is far too sane to imagine, in the fashion of the decadents, that it is possible to get to the inside of a subject without getting to the heart of it. "Simple sentiment," he very shrewdly observes, "appeals to all sorts and conditions of men and women except the

lasé, for whom no doctor has yet been able to find a emedy—except a dose of hard labour."

Another thing which attracts me to Mr. Grein's criticism that though he is what some would call modern, he is ot duped by mere modernity. He is not "enticed by lique or fashion to lend a too willing ear to those who are lways ready to blare 'masterpiece' when a play is merely *recieux* . . . but then, personally, I hate everything that what the French call *factice*." A great deal of modern rt claims to be created in the spirit of to-morrow because is very carefully and laboriously copied from what was one only yesterday. A thing is called futurist merely ecause it is fashionable; curiously ignoring the fact that he fashion will be over when the future arrives. The ritic is not deceived because the machinery of the modern aker can copy the newest furniture as well as the oldest, nd turn out the copies very quickly by mass production.

If it will give a fictitious air of importance to my opinions n dramatic criticism to disagree as well as agree with it, I hould personally be disposed to argue with Mr. Grein about Back to Methuselah." I do not think it is a sort of igantic jest; I think it is quite sincere and extremely erious, but, from my point of view, a little narrow and anatical. Perhaps I have a personal bias in the matter; eing myself so often congratulated on talking nonsense hen I believe I am talking sense. Anyhow, it seems to me hat in both cases there is always a simple test. Mr. Bernard haw exaggerates his ideas; but he would not exaggerate ny other ideas. He presents what he thinks true in a antastic form or shape; but he would not present what e thinks false in any shape or form. I can imagine him riting a play as long as the library of Herbert Spencer; ut it would not profess the politics of Herbert Spencer. He will lead us back to Methuselah; but he would never

lead us back to Mill. Nobody who knows him can imagine him conceiving the most preposterous pantomime about the Missing Link and the Superman, of which the upshot should be that the Capitalist is entitled to triumph on Darwinian principles of the survival of the fittest. All through the five parts of the fantasia I feel the thread of the theory held by Shaw, both where I agree and where I differ. I agree with the view that anybody who puts his hope in evolution must get rid of Darwinism. I differ about the necessity for anybody putting his hope in evolution. It seems to me that evolution is the enemy of reform, because it is the enemy of form. I do not admit that it is "enough that there is a beyond" if it is beyond good and evil; for good, as St. Thomas Aquinas said, is the object of desire. In short, I differ from Mr. Bernard Shaw in religion; but I think that "Back to Methuselah" does really contain his religion and I do not think any the worse of it because the cathedral is very large and the gargoyles are very extravagant.

But whether we agree or disagree with Mr. Grein's criticisms, there is always something to agree or disagree with. It is the advantage of this finer sort of journalism that it is what some would call the more frivolous sort. For that very reason this sort of journalism is never journalese. I do not mean by the phrase to imply any snobbish superiority in matters of style; but there is such a thing as thinking in journalese as well as writing in it. And those who think in journalese are mostly those engaged on what is called the most serious sort of journalism; those who write political leading articles on matters of statesmanship and sociology. It is when people are utterly solemn and responsible that they use what are generally called clichés or more naturally called clap-trap. Mr. Grein never uses dead words in this way; his criticism is always a genuine and lively impression if it be an individual impression; and

he has the great talent of describing it without destroying it. And indeed I think this sort of sincerity is more common in such things as theatrical criticism than in those social or scientific controversies, that are supposed to be weightier and are certainly heavier. The collection of letters which Mr. Grein prints in his symposium on Acting and Feeling shows how well actors can write when they write about acting. And as it is with the actors, so it is with the audience. It is much more likely that people's favourite actor really is their favourite actor than that the politician they support is really the politician they admire. It is much more likely that they will complain of something that really is a nuisance in the theatre than of anything that really is a nuisance in the State. Much is said nowadays against the cult of pleasure, not without reason; and it is possible to make far too much of the cult of art. It is only fair to count this truth on the other side; that there is a certain candour about the world of impressions and sensations that there is not always in the world of theories and of laws; and that in this sense it is not only possible to dispute about tastes, but they are the things about which men dispute with least hypocrisy and sophistry. Mr. Grein is above all things an embodiment of exactly this sort of humane independence and detachment; and it is that spirit that can save the drama from being frivolous—and from being serious.

G. K. Chesterton.

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THE NEW WORLD OF THE THEATRE

I

November 18th, 1922.

"THE SECRET AGENT"—THE LATE ALFRED CAPUS

I MIGHT head this review "Why Conrad Fails as a Dramatist," but that would sound harsh when a man of his gifts approaches the stage. It is more apposite to inquire, "When will Conrad succeed as a dramatist?" For the equipment is there, and the spring-board too: the plot of the "Secret Agent" is more poignant and dramatic than the trite stories of many plays which have run many nights. Winnie Verloc, who linked her life to the chequered and dangerous existence of a spy and an active anarchist, is a tragic figure—almost as tragic as a heroine of Euripides. She did not marry for love; she married to shelter her mother, a kleptomaniac on a small scale, and her half-witted brother, whom she adored above all things in the world. Her husband, driven by his nefarious employers of a foreign Embassy to throw bombs on public buildings, uses the boy as his helpmate, and when the poor devil is about to carry out his orders the bomb hidden in his coat-pocket explodes prematurely and blows him to smithereens. When Winnie learns the truth she kills her husband; and as a strange concatenation of events fastens the guilt upon the man who, under pretence of love, had robbed her, she escapes the arm of the law and is left to remorse.

If Mr. Conrad had told the story in simple directness it would not have failed. It contains all the elements of a moving play. But he loses his thread in byways. He attempts to blend his narrative with political and ethical side-issues, after the manner of Bernard Shaw. But Shaw, who knows the technique of the theatre to perfection, knows, consequently, how to intersperse these discussions without marring his theme. Conrad's debates seem irrelevant, wearisome, an obstacle to his dramatic progress. Even if we did not know that the play was derived from a book, we should feel that a few random pages of essays have been wedged into the story, maybe to give it an air of profoundness or to redeem it from the possible taint of "melodrama." Again, time after time we are struck by the novelist's vain attempt to remould into plausible drama that which in the book was explained at length. The result is condensation of facts and *milieus* which lose all their reality, and repetition of things which have happened before. It is hardly conceivable that a student of life, even if he were now living in a country corner, could have such wrong visions of society and of police methods as are here depicted. It was a rare mixture of lay-figures in a *salon* and naïve discussions of a Commissioner and his Chief Inspector. Yet Mr. Conrad can draw characters: the wife, the secret agent, the ex-anarchist Professor, the *souteneur* type, with his bombs and hot air, are very well drawn, but they were incongruously placed in the drama.

To put it pointedly, Mr. Conrad has not yet mastered two exigencies of stage projection—distribution and economy. His figures are lost in random scenes and excess of talk. Hence, disjointedness of evolution, loss of interest, delay of climax, and, most fatal of all, destruction of dramatic situations, for want of knowledge when to stop. All these things, difficult to define, since the theatre

is governed by no law, can only be appreciated by seeing the play and deriving profit from the object-lesson. They can be remedied by practice. For this is not a case of an author who essays drama without knowing what it means, but of one who has all the incipient gifts without yet having learned how to use them. With his imagination, his power to devise the outline of a story, his wonderful gift of dialogue when he sticks to the main road and leaves the byways alone, he is bound to write a play of quality. All he needs at present is a craftsman by his side who can tell him the difference between stage and book, and adapt his vision (as well as his expression) to the peculiar focus of the theatre.

* * * * * *

There is a certain analogy between the careers of Alfred Capus and Edmond Rostand; for, as dramatists, both owed their sudden celebrity to the appearance of their work at the right moment. We experienced a similar rise at home when John Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln" struck the gong-note in war-time. Both Capus and Rostand had made their mark long before the former became world-famed with "La Veine" and the latter with "Cyrano de Bergerac"; but the real cause of their vogue was that these two plays came at a moment when France was full of the joy of living and rebelled against the drab and darkness of a realistic school which had run into extremes.

Capus—latterly the editor of the *Figaro*, and one of those brilliant journalists who knew how to coin the right word at the right time, and who was a master of the *filet*, the leaderette which crystallises an important subject in a few telling lines—was essentially a student of his people. He understood its temperament; he knew when to appease and when to kindle; he had a far-seeing eye, and in this foresight he stuck to his guns whether public opinion

agreed with him or raged wildly in strife over a burning question of the day. Thus, when all France was split up in two hostile camps of opinion, he was the steadfast defender of Dreyfus; and later the destroyer of the Wilson idolatry; the champion of the Tiger after his defeat on the Presidential question; and, above all, the unswerving ally of Poincaré when the latter sank much of his popularity into his candour as a critic of the Government.

As a playwright Capus was a kind of Dumas up to date. He had a romantic touch, but he was at heart a satirist, and, like a skilful apothecary, he would render a little didactic pill palatable by its pleasant coating. Shorn of its story, "La Veine" is what in Dumas' days was called a play *à thèse*. Only, Dumas handled the sword, often double-edged; Capus swayed the rapier, damascened with such wit and such glibness of dialogue that the object-lesson never became obtrusive. If Dumas had written "La Veine," his style would have been combative; Capus's manner was gently persuasive when driving home the fact that some time Chance will knock at every man's door, and that all depends on it whether the man is there to open, and whether, when he has opened, he knows what to do with his visitor. It is not everybody's gift to appreciate a good thing when it flies, like the proverbial roast pigeon, into our mouth. For Capus understood that the time was past to preach; that the happy-go-lucky trend of thought of the beginning of the century would appreciate an "omelette surprise" in preference to a heavy pancake; that much wit, a little malice, a dash of amorality—which is another thing than immorality—would be the right antidote to pontification and pessimistic realism. Thus he achieved success after success—"Les Deux Écoles"—perhaps his masterpiece of humour—"La Petite Fonctionnaire," "L'Adversaire." But his lasting fame remains

attached to "La Veine," because its human note has become proverbial. "Chance will some time knock at everybody's door: to know when to say 'Come in'—that is the question."

Capus has, as far as I remember, never been heard on the English stage, perhaps because both "La Veine" and "Les Deux Écoles" could scarcely be adapted; but now that he is gone, and that his life-work comes under review, the idea might commend itself to some enterprising manager —or, rather, manageress—that "Rosine" and "La Petite Fonctionnaire" would be trump cards in their hands.

II

December 9th, 1922.

MAKING "STARS"—PLAYS IN BOOK-FORM

CAN criticism "make" actors? That was my final query when, in a recent issue, I discussed the influence of the critic on the fate of a play, and urged that, to the question whether he can "make" a play, "the answer is in the negative."

But quite different are my opinion and my experience where the actor or the actress is concerned. I say, undoubtedly, criticism can place the artist on a permanent pedestal, even if the opinion of the public remain divided. There are many cases on record which go to prove the assertion. I remember that in the 'eighties the two leading critics of Amsterdam, both fervent admirers of an actress who enjoyed much popularity in a second-rate theatre, decided that she was "great," and that the time had come to say so. They awaited the opportunity, and then one evening she created "La Dame aux Camélias" by Dumas. Before the event all Amsterdam was agog, for the critics who controlled the largest circulations had forecast a triumph. Her performance was admirable. Next morning the Press was one pæan of praise. The land rang with the name of Theo Frenkel; as Mrs. Mann, she is still the greatest actress of Holland—one of the greatest of the world. But for the bar of language, she would have been as renowned as Sarah Bernhardt and Duse.

Almost on the heels of Mrs. Mann's elevation followed the phenomenal rise of the Duse. In the early 'nineties

she was unknown beyond the boundaries of Italy. But in 1892 there was a theatrical exhibition in Vienna, the first of its kind. All Europe was represented, and suddenly the wires and the pen spread the joyful message across the Continent: a new actress, a great actress—greater than Sarah, for her manner is absolutely modern, her playing like nature itself. In a few days the name of Eleonora Duse was known in every literary circle; reams of critical laudation added fuel to the new flame of glory. Duse, through the Press, became immortal, her progress a triumphal march. The same year was illuminated by that memorable evening at the St. James's when Mrs. Patrick Campbell played the "Second Mrs. Tanqueray," and both author and actress had their "grand soir." True, it was not the Press which proclaimed Mrs. Patrick Campbell: the public burst into round after round of frenzied applause; but the next morning the unanimous blare of the critics heralded her advent and made the name of Mrs. Patrick Campbell famous.

In these latter days, to record but a few instances at home, Sybil Thorndike, after years and years of toil in the provinces and at the Old Vic, reached the pinnacle when all the critics pronounced her Medea germane to greatness and called her the one and only tragic actress of our modern stage. Moscovitch—a hero in the East, where his carriage was frequently unhorsed and Jewry worshipped him as an artistic Messias—migrated westward, played Shylock in English, and became the man of the hour. Indeed, so much incense was burned in his honour for his one creation that one remembers with some trepidation the Dutch adage: "They are strong shoulders that can carry much luxury."

Now, the reason why criticism can "make" actors more easily than plays is not so far to seek. As soon as an actor

is lifted to fame, he becomes a cynosure of all eyes; he becomes a celebrity, and thereby the prey of paragraphist, press-agent, and interviewer. What he does, what he thinks, how he lives—sometimes how he loves—it is all of interest to the crowd; it makes excellent copy. Nor must his vogue be allowed to remain ephemeral; the limelight must shine on him by day and by night, and every day and every night. His is the fate of Ahasuerus, except that the flames, instead of scorching him, envelop him in greater radiation of glory. Such is fame and such the propelling power of criticism.

* * * * * *

It is a capital idea of the British Drama League to encourage playwrights and play-readers by the publication of dramas in book-form. It opens up a wide field, practically untilled; for, compared with other countries, we lag far behind in this respect. Abroad, unless an author is afraid of American piracy, which is gradually becoming nonplussed by the new copyright treaties, nearly every play that has been acted finds its way to the bookshop. Here the publishers, unless they be as enterprising as the Heinemanns and the Duckworths, are generally still afraid of publishing plays, on the plea that ours is not a play-reading public. This, however, is an exploded notion. Nor can we accept the argument that the exceptions of Shaw, Pinero and Masefield, who are ready sellers, confirm the rule. Those who are familiar with the so-called "earnest students" of the drama know their eagerness to read plays; and, at any rate in the provincial cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, and Nottingham, wherever there are Playgoers' Clubs, there is not only a great demand for private perusal, but play-reading in public, with a distribution of parts, forms an attractive feature of the winter season. Indeed, more than once authors whose

plays were produced but not published have been requested to lend their manuscripts for the purpose, and more than one dramatist, so far unacted and unpublished, has come to the fore because the public reading was so successful that it tempted a manager to launch it on the boards. Although the world does not know it, there are many little circles in the suburbs of London where play-reading *viva voce* is a cult; and, since so few English plays are published, the Tchekoffs and the Tolstois become better known than the home-grown drama.

The plan of the Drama League is, therefore, one which deserves encouragement, and, with a little gumption in those who sit in judgment on the selection, it may become both popular and remunerative. But two chief points should not be lost sight of—namely, catholicity of taste and moderation of price: three shillings and sixpence a volume is too dear. The Drama League would pride itself that it is manned by and appeals to the "intelligentsia"—in other words, it would select plays by a certain class of writers who by their trend of thought and their style are what is best understood by the word *précieux*, and more literary than dramatic. But what we want above all is the publication of actable plays, which, for some reason or other, have found so far no way to the boards, and through reading may get there.

All this is not mere theory and conjecture. I have for a long time studied the question of the "printed play," and I feel sure that it will benefit the theatre. Besides, there is the late experience of the Paris *Comœdia* before it became recently an organ of academic austerity. Week after week it contained a *feuilleton* by one of its leading critics dealing with "printed plays so far unacted." It related the plot, criticised the technique, the characters, and the dialogue, and finally indicated, as far as conjecture

would permit, the chances of success of production. The result of this regular *enquete* has been very fruitful and gratifying. Managers—particularly those who had just suffered failure—perused the article, and on several occasions, thanks to the advice of the critic, opened their doors to the novice, ventured, and won. Here there is a new channel for our professional papers, the *Era* and the *Stage*, to render signal service to the cause. Let it be known by them that henceforth at fixed periods the printed play unacted will be dealt with as critically and exhaustively as the "play produced," and no doubt it will stimulate authors to activity and enterprise. After all, on the principle of "half a loaf," etc., a play in the drawer of one's desk is Dead Sea fruit, whereas in book-form it becomes alive and may see the light.

III

December 16th, 1922.

THE THEATRE IN BULGARIA

From time to time I hope to tell my readers something about theatrical life in countries which are not exactly over the way, like France and Germany, but more reminiscent of our late Premier's question: "Where is Tetschen?"—a geographical exclamation which will go down to history with that of Judge Coleridge anent Connie Gilchrist. For it is an interesting study, this observation of how the theatre thrives in countries which have only recently been emancipated from serfdom, and in the first breath of freedom have created a national life.

Take Bulgaria, our late enemy, under pressure of the mailed fist. Has anybody over here an idea of what is going on in Sofia? Does anyone care to read the national Bulgar poets: Vojnikov, the father of the Bulgarian Theatre; Popov, the first Director of the National Theatre; Drumov, better known as Father Clement, the Metropolitan of Sofia, the dramatic historian of his country?

Seventy years ago there was no theatre in Bulgaria, then under the Turk; and the Turk for a long time would not allow enlightenment. So the first experiments were tried by stealth and fits and starts. Nor were the drama and its exponents anything else but elementary. The peasants had to be trained to listen to the new form of entertainment; Vojnikov wrote little dialogues, mostly with a political, economical, or domestic purpose—little problem-plays, in fact—and gradually the taste spread, and he, licensed by

the Turks (who had discovered that the theatre kept the population quiet), by degrees widened the scope and ambition of the plays. He improvised a theatre of rough seats and no fire-place, with scenery brushed by amateurs who knew very little about anything else but villages and hovels; with costumes devised grotesquely by the local jobbing tailor, whose intentions were palpably superior to his artistic capacity. But the people had caught fire: the theatre, albeit in lofts and barns and tents, became the order of the day, and plays and players improved as time went on.

In 1888 (take note, ye readers who happen to be County Councillors and other *patres curiæ!*) the State of Bulgaria—which was still a very humble Principality and did not dream of Ferdinand and his Tsardom—granted the first subsidy to the company of the "Bulgarian Theatre," which was then housed in a wooden shanty such as we find still in English country fairs. The acting in those days was still archaic; the plays mainly were translations from the French and German, or adaptations from the Russian, which is familiar to most Bulgarians. Twenty years later there took place in Sofia the inauguration of the National Theatre —*built by the State; maintained by the State.* I have seen pictures of it; it is not very large, but more up to date than most theatres in London, especially on the scenic side. Thenceforward, the National Theatre of Bulgaria took great flights; the actors, after studies in Paris and Vienna, were real artists (the Bulgarians are full of temperament); the native playwrights, too, were no longer amateurs, but, stimulated by the Russian school of the Tchekoffs, Tolstois, Dostoievskies, tried to reproduce national life in their works. With the war the flood of Russian refugees peopled Bulgaria with many actors of renown who came to stay; soon Sofia had its Renaissance

Theatre giving operettas, and its Free Theatre, with its own high-brow *clientèle ;* and every fair-sized city now has its playhouse and its own company, while once a year the Bulgarian National Theatre—this is a condition of the subsidy—tours around the provinces so that the country may learn what is done with the country's money. And our Shakespeare Memorial administrators grant one miserable thousand per annum to the Old Vic ; the State does nothing at all ! They do things better in Bulgaria !

IV

December 23rd, 1922.

THE MAGIC OF PLAY-TITLES

Two controversies have lately kept tongues wagging and pens busy. The first is: Can the title influence the career of a play? The other: Will costs kill the theatre? Ian Hay has been challenged because he called his play, in which the hero (who was really a mild villain) was drowned, to the relief of his forsaken wife and family, "The Happy Ending." Some people took exception; some did not like it; some missed the satirical point; some predicted unfavourable effects on the box-office. Personally, I think that in this particular case the title is of no consequence, for it is one of those titles which excite little comment. It is ordinary, not to say banal; one reads it and passes on. But undoubtedly now and again a title has immensely whetted the public curiosity on account of happy coinage, a touch of mystery, an analogy to a current saying, a soupçon of spice. Titles, like window-dressing, have a way of attracting the passer-by. Watch our shopping quarters at Christmas time. One, two, three windows are unobtrusive; at a fourth there is a little group of onlookers, an ebb and flow, the indescribable something that magnetises one person after another. Yet the wares of the happy window may have none of the value, nor even the taste, of the others that are overlooked. It is the same with the titles. When the man in the street reads: "The Girl Who Took the Wrong Turning," he opens his eyes wide; would like to know. When he—and she even more so—sees: "A

Little Bit of Fluff," he says, "What ho! This wants looking into." When flaming posters proclaim: "Midnight Follies," the *flaneurs* think of a nice supper and a nice girl to take to it; when the stranger in our gates hears "Decameron Nights," he thinks of Boccaccio and something very, very naughty. When the little girl who revels in the morning picture-papers hears of "East of Suez," she begins to dream of the Orient and its glamour and luxuries; when she hears of "Passion," she muses over love and all it means to her; when "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" meets her eye, she becomes excited, although she cannot pronounce the title or understand it; when she repeats in languorous tones, "Romance," with the accent on the "o," her whole being is a-longing and a-sighing—she must see it, if her last penny has to go for it. And so on, *ad infinitum*, whether you mention "Bluebeard's Eighth Wife," "The Perfect Lover," "My Old Dutch," "The Cat and the Canary," or any name that catches the eye, lingers in the memory, dances on the tongue.

It is no criterion, for, if a play is really dull, not all the titles in the world will save it; nor can a multi-coloured ring round a bad cigar make a popular brand. But undoubtedly, if the play answers in some way the promise of its name, it is pretty certain that the one will help to advertise the other, and that people will be more easily attracted than by such prosy, matter-of-fact titles as, for instance, "Destruction," "Chains," "Loyalties," etc., when the fate of the play depends entirely upon its merits and its interpretation. To sum it up in a few words and an example: Why did a certain pill make fame and fortune for its inventor at one fell swoop? Because he had the inspiration to dub them "Worth a Guinea a Box"—it hit and it stuck, and it went forth through the land. Was the

medicine better than others? It is not for me to judge. Nor would I answer for the merits of "A Little Bit of Fluff," yet I know that everybody in Society, Bohemia, and Suburbia went to see it, because the title appealed to the public's imagination—or one of the other senses?

V

January 20th, 1923.

FIRST NIGHTS AND AFTER—THE AUTHOR

"It will be alright on the night" is the common saying in the theatre when the dress-rehearsal has been laborious, unprofitable, flat. Then comes the *première*, and generally the excitement, the vibration, the "wish-to-win" turn yesterday's dullness into brilliancy. The atmosphere of the first night is like the firmament before the thunderstorm: clouds of fear almost benumb the actors when they emerge from their dressing-rooms and—some—totter to the stage as one condemned to death might totter to the scaffold. But no sooner is the curtain up, the cue uttered, than the electricity of lightning flits through the clouds and never ceases fulminating till all is over, and those on the stage, overcome, frequently do not recognise whether it is victory or fall, or even that worst of all forms of verdict, the lukewarmness of a *succès d'estime*.

As in most things, reaction sets in after the strain. The second night is the *bête noire* of the actors, who either repose on their laurels or, resigned to failure, work hard but spiritlessly. The second-night audience, too—not necessarily of secondary quality, but unenthusiastic and never in the festive mood of a *première*—is unresponsive. There is no "go"; the applause is weak—often we ask: "Is this the same performance which yesterday was greeted with thunderous ovation?" The whole thing is a "dud," and only the experienced critic, who prefers, perhaps, to remain uninfluenced by surroundings, knows how to mete

out justice according to merit without consideration of the flatness of atmosphere. Usually, after the third night, things settle down normally, and for a long time the play, if successful, runs night after night in the same high degree of careful interpretation, so much so that one could almost speak of a *cliché* of efficiency and spirit.

But gradually something develops which is both interesting and often distressing; and to this I would refer, because latterly it has become the rule rather than the exception.

I have observed—and I should be glad to hear whether any of my readers have experienced it, also—that, say after the fiftieth night, leading actors entirely vary their first reading. Some deteriorate; but that is, nowadays, except in certain musical comedies and at matinées, not a frequent occurrence—although I could name an instance of an artist who made an enormous hit, but on two occasions when I was present simply walked through the part—effect of a swollen head and a "cushy job," no doubt. Others seem to have acquired a notion that their first reading was mistaken, and that the moment has come—now that the author's eye is no longer at the peephole—to reincarnate the whole character from beginning to end. There are plays in vogue at the present moment in which leading exponents give a reading completely the opposite of the initial one. Thus, in one case, the artist has turned the comedy aspect into one of farce; in another, the character, which was hard, with an undercurrent of sympathy, is re-created into a figure adamant and without any undercurrent of the softer side.

To criticise these mutations is not my business; it is the author's. I had my say after the first night, and life were not worth living had I to begin all over again with my summing-up each time the sweet will of the player induced him to vary his gamut. But to an ordinary

observer the feature is one worthy of examination. What can be the cause of it? What is the object? Is it going to become a habit or to remain an ephemeral innovation? It may be—and I should welcome the views of the artists themselves on the subject—an unconscious change. Some practised hands become so inured to their part and the dialogue that they can play it aptly while thinking of other things. Even Coquelin admitted this when he was asked what he felt after the first night. He felt nothing, he said, and "*souvent je pense à autre chose.*" I have heard the same thing from fiddlers, pianists, singers. The only worker in the theatre who could, or should, not think of *autre chose* is the critic, lest routine render him stale and unprofitable.

It may be design. There are artists so keen on their work that they never cease studying, probing, altering it—just as one of our great authors (George Moore) is never finished and done with his work: has he not rewritten at least one of his novels because he disliked the first mould? The question is whether this laudable task is justifiable, and just to the author? I take it that any experienced dramatist visualises any part he creates; that he guides the actor at rehearsal according to his vision and conception; for aught we know, he may be right or wrong in his "moulding," but, after all, he is the "father," and every character is a unit in his scheme. To alter it on the strength of a mere individual opinion is an arbitrary act which may impair the intention of the play, although there are instances when the new reading enhanced the interest; as in strategy sometimes does the unbidden move of a second in command. But, on the whole, I think the practice should be discouraged; or, if the artist thinks that he has cogent reasons to "vary," he should consult his superior officer—in this case not the manager, but the

author. Often enough, dialogue is made to suffer and to become debased by "gag." If it became permissible to change the nature of impersonations wholesale, what would become of ensemble, harmony, atmosphere—in fine, all that should be symphonic in dramatic art? A little Bolshevism may be fascinating, but it is a dangerous thing.

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One of the puzzles of our theatre is the comparative obscurity of the author as far as the general public is concerned. Whereas the name of every little, tenth-rate star of musical comedy and ditto low comedian is a household word in the suburbs, hardly anybody remembers the author unless his success is so penetrating that he becomes a daily feature in paragraphs and puffs. On the first night the cry is, even after a failure, "Author! Author!"—an ovation, a demand for speech. On the morrow his flame flickers on programme and poster (in smaller characters than the stars!), and ten to one, not half—nay, not a quarter—of the crowd who hailed him last night could say by whom the play was written. He is merely "What's-his-name."

It is a strange symptom, and perhaps a survival of the conservative views of last century, when stockbrokers and solicitors were referred to as not quite "it" from the Society standard, and doctors were spoken of rather contemptibly as "medical men" and "medicos," instead of being titled by their degree. What is the cause? Am I far wrong if I surmise that in the early Victorian days, when actors were still somewhat beyond the pale as "rogues and vagabonds," the author, scandalously remunerated, was all too often associated with the pothouse and dissolute habits? If so, then why the phenomenal rise of the actor on the social ladder, and why still a certain disregard of the fountain-head of the entertainment? Probably the

limelight, the glamour of the stage, has something to do with it. In no country in the world, not even France, has the actor risen to such a pinnacle as in England; but whereas in France and elsewhere the author is number one, and the actor number two, here all too often the writer of the play is treated as a *qualité négligeable*—on the same level as the producer—looked upon as an artisan, whereas in reality these twain are the very soul of the theatre. Even some managers treat the author lightly, and would not dare to tamper with their stars as they do with the chief factor in their business.

It seems on the surface a mere question of form and appreciation. But there is much more in it than meets the naked eye. With due respect to the profession, the supremacy of the actor is not an unmixed blessing, and the lesser valuation of the author would furnish a partial explanation of the plaint that our theatre does not make the same stride onwards as in other lands.

VI

January 27th, 1923.

SHAW IN FLEMISH—A PEOPLE'S THEATRE FOR EAST LONDON

In Antwerp a week ago I saw big placards: "Royal Flemish Theatre—'De Vlinder,' by Bernhard Shaw." *Vlinder* in Flemish means butterfly in English, and although it is my pride to claim familiarity with the drama of our famous "G. B. S.," I was puzzled. I could not remember any play with a name approaching "Butterfly." I asked right and left; I telephoned to a well-known critic. "Can you tell me where *Vlinder* comes in in the Shavian drama?" Pause. "Don't know." So I went to the theatre, and no sooner had the curtain risen than the scales fell from my eyes. It was our dear old friend "The Philanderer," which, as far as I can remember, has never had a London run. Hereby hangs a tale. In 1893 my Independent Theatre had successfully launched Shaw as a dramatist with "Widower's Houses," when he announced that he had a new play ready, and asked whether I, Dorothy Leighton, the novelist, and Charles Ashton Johnson, my associates, would hear it, the idea being to give it during the season? Shaw read it to us, and although he is as brilliant a reader as he is a creator, I was amused, but not impressed. Frankly, I found the play excessively verbose, overloaded with side-issues on bacteria and so on, which struck me as irrelevant, and would, I feared, weary the audience. When the long lecture was over, my opinion was: "Too much cackle and too few 'osses"—this, of course, most politely, for already Shaw was our Jupiter,

and we were convinced that our opinion was but that of the groundlings.

I do not quite remember what Miss Leighton and Mr. Ashton Johnson said, but vaguely, I believe, they were enthusiastic about the dialogue and not hopeful of the story. Personally, I was, moreover, convinced that the English actors of that day could not possibly cope with the flood of dialogue—that their tongues were not glib enough to rattle it off at the lightning speed required. Shaw was probably much amused at our lack of appreciation, and took his manuscript away. What happened next I don't quite know; I think "The Philanderer" was given at Manchester by Miss Horniman, and some time in Repertory at the Coronet, Notting Hill Gate. I never saw it, and when I read it in "Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant," I still more admired the dialogue and still found it very long.

Now when I saw it in Flemish, I found quite "another pair of sleeves." It was a Sunday afternoon; the good Flemish *bourgeois* packed the theatre. The setting was not only modern but faultlessly British—except that the club servant wore bright stockbroker spats on shiny boots; otherwise, rooms of home and club such as we may find at home, and a cut of clothes *à la* Bond Street. From the very first line the audience caught fire and the actors dashed along at lightning speed. Next to me sat the famous Flemish critic, Auguste Monet, whose play, "When the Bells are Ringing," I hope to show to London. He looked at me with gleaming eyes, in which I read the word "Brilliant." He demurred a little at the bacteria business. "Shaw is too fond of side-jumps," he said; "but what a wonderful comedy! How modern; how cynical; how devilishly clever; how strangely up to date, in spite of the play being of 1894!" As for the actors, to them the yards and miles of words meant nothing.

Produced by the new leader of the Flemish Theatre, Dr. de Gruyter, a man of mark, every tirade went home, every character was rightly moulded.

I reflected: if we could only get "The Philanderer" thus produced, if we could get our actors to work up steam to attain the right pace, it would be a huge success in London. For we have the men—Ernest Milton would be ideal as the Philanderer; and the quintette, headed by Dawson Milward, which has rendered the club scene in "Loyalties" memorable would admirably round off the male cast. The women we have, too—a part for Miriam Lewes, another for Madge Titheradge. So let Mr. Basil Dean, the right man to do the play, take note. If he incorporates it in his matinée scheme he will spin silk and gather laurels. But is it not wonderful that Dr. de Gruyter has re-discovered "The Philanderer," and that the renascence of the play may hail from Antwerp? Once more the prophet had found honour abroad; and to think that in 1894 I was dense enough to let this gem slip through my fingers!

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One of my daydreams is near realisation. The other, the National Theatre, like the birds, still flutters on the telegraph-wires, as the Dutch saying goes. But one bird is well in hand, for I have met Mr. A. E. Filmer, the well-known producer of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, with some fine performances in his record. And as he now thinks that the time has come to pursue his ideals in London, and as I was much impressed by his ideas, we put our heads together and determined to do for this side of the Thames what Miss Baylis has so marvellously achieved over Waterloo Bridge—to create a People's Theatre in the East End. The plan is still in the process of evolution, although realisation is in the offing, for we have found a

well-known manager, who owns a splendid theatre down East, willing to join hands with us, and to let us start in May with a repertory of revivals and new plays. We shall leave Shakespeare alone—at any rate at the beginning—for our company will be but small and select, and we know that there is a vast public in Whitechapel and purlieus for Shaw, Pinero, Carton, Jones, Houghton, Maugham, and the rest of the phalanx which constitutes the modern drama of these isles. Our system will be a play a fortnight; a three months' season in the spring; then a tour; and in the autumn once more some months in East London. We are going to adopt the system of commonwealth, which implies a small capital (part found—walk up, you enthusiasts!); a living wage for every actor; the net result to be divided between a reserve fund, management remuneration, and the actors *pro rata* to their salary. Now here is, I venture to say, a chance for the British playwright, a chance for the young generation, a chance for Whitechapel—perhaps a chance to bring West to East; for, if our public crosses the bridge to go to the Old Vic, there is no reason why it should not be lured beyond the frontier line of Aldgate Pump.

VII

February 24th, 1923.

THE RETURN OF GEORGE MOORE

The forthcoming production of "The Coming of Gabrielle," by George Moore, with Leslie Faber and Athene Seyler in the main parts, is an event of importance for several reasons. George Moore is one of the great literary figures in England of our time; he is one of the few whom everybody on the Continent knows—and reads. Some of his books, such as "Esther Waters" and "The Brook Kerith," are quoted in the high schools abroad as modern classics. Nor is it the first time that Moore has tried to climb the tree on which flourishes the theatrical laurel. In the dim and distant past he wrote, if I remember well, a blood-and-thunder drama, just as did William Archer, who has since returned to the fickle Muse and made a fortune by her favours. Next George Moore entered the arena in earnest with "The Strike at Arlingford," which it was my privilege to produce under the flag of the Independent Theatre; about this, more anon. Then came, *longo intervallo*, "The Bending of the Bough," a work of moment, but before its time; it should be seen again and acted on the lines of to-day.

"The Strike at Arlingford" saw the light through a challenge. George Moore, austere critic in his essays, had said many true and severe things about our stage of the 'eighties. "The Strike" was famous, between covers, in the land of literature, but no manager would tackle it. The Independent Theatre, ever on the alert to spot new

talent, had just "discovered" Shaw, and was ready for Moore. But, if Art in these days yet goes a-begging, in the last century it was simply starving. We had enterprise of the most daring type, but debts and no money. Then came a providential bolt from the blue. George R. Sims, of all people in the world, and in every way a contrast to Moore, stated in the *Referee* that he would give £100 if Moore would come into the open with his play. £100, *c'était le Perou!* and the Independents, having obtained Moore's consent, pounced upon the prize like vultures. The play was put into rehearsal; Florence West (afterwards better known, when a better actress, as Mrs. Lewis Waller, who created a furore as Zaza) was the leading lady. The production was the theatrical event of the year. All the earnest students of the drama mustered in force; all the literary world was there; all the critics were there too.

Now Moore, whose independence of mind is well known, had, some time before the production, analysed dramatic criticism of the day in articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, full of home truths, and endeavouring to demonstrate the inefficiency of the majority of critics. It is not for me to say whether he was right or wrong, but I realised that the rod was in pickle and that there would be a day of reckoning. That day was the *première* of "The Strike at Arlingford," which achieved a mere *succès d'estime*, mainly (I may declare it now) because it was not well acted and the heroine—afterwards destined to become famous—was totally unmagnetic. Nor were the other actors in those distant days capable of interpreting realistic work humanly. The play was acted in the artificial sense of the word. What moved us at perusal paled at rehearsal, became lifeless on the trial night. Next day the critics stood as stark in opposite camps as when Richard offered his kingdom for a horse. The intellectuals were laudatory—with qualifica-

tions, it is true; the old brigade were destructive and mixed acid with their ink. George Moore, I think, was not discouraged, but disgusted with this under-estimation. He would never write a play again, he vowed; yet he did. The theatre is an Atlantide; once in its charmed circle there is no escape except death. So, when "The Coming of Gabrielle" was first to be presented by Nigel Playfair at Hammersmith and relinquished and offered to Leon M. Lion, we, after reading it, decided at once to give it a hearing and to cast it as ideally as our forces would permit. Whatever the result, we found the game well worth the candle, and whether success or failure crown the joint effort, it will be our pride to have sponsored once more one of the great authors of the day.

VIII

March 10th, 1923.

A GREAT ADVENTURE

One day last week there wafted into my office a Russian doctor with two charming women and a middle-aged gentleman who captivated me at once by his ascetic, artistic face. The doctor said: "This is Monsieur Nicolas Legat, late of the Imperial Opera at Moscow; and this is Madame Nicolaeva, *prima ballerina* of the Imperial Opera. Both refugees and have gone through the inferno of Bolshevism—will you lend them a hand? They are great artists; Legat was the teacher of Pavlova, of Karsavina, of Prebajenskaya, of Nijinski; and the French authorities thought so much of his talent that after a performance they made him an Officier d'Académie. Nicolaeva is renowned as a great follower of the classic school, and her particular gift is the rare variety with which she impersonates the folk-lore dances of many nations. She is one of the few who 'in one fell swoop' passed the difficult examination of *prima ballerina* when she was a mere pupil under Legat's tuition."

I confess I was deeply interested in these people, so modest, so informing, so full of their art, so alone in London. "Would I see them dance?" "Yes; but when and where?" I was just packing my traps to fly to the Riviera, and time failed me to arrange for a theatre. "Come to our hall, where we practise every day and all day," they pleaded, and so I yielded.

It was a pilgrimage; a little hall somewhere in the

wilds of Cricklewood, and adjacent to a Catholic church, of all places in the world. There was nothing to kindle illusion: no stage, a bare floor, bald walls, dim light, on a kind of platform a piano, a few chairs—for me, a friend, and Nicolaeva's relation, an "Excellency," ex-Admiral of the Russian fleet, now a gentleman of leisure and sorrow in the Great City. Nicolaeva wore a light hoop skirt of muslin; Legat was in his "smock"—no illusion in their "get up" either. Yet, when they began with a *pas-de-deux* from "Carmen," the spell came as if by magic; that prosaic hall became a temple, the poetry of motion spread enchantment.

It was a great adventure, for I have seen all the celebrities of the choreographic world of my time. I can hark back well-nigh half a century, when Elssler was still alive, and Taglioni the talk of Europe. I have seen most of the Russian ballets; indeed, the Prince (I forget his name) who was their pioneer came to me long before the war, a few years before Paris had seen them or London had an inkling of their existence. I have been with some of the great artists in private rehearsal, and by experience I can class a dancer at once according to merit. So I may be forgiven for being exigent, difficult to please, and for a somewhat lukewarm approach to my new protégés. But they came; I saw; they conquered. I shall never forget the sensation of how this woman in rehearsal flimsies, this artist in the khaki of his smock—looking almost like an inmate of H.M.'s hostel, Wormwood Scrubbs—overwhelmed me and my companion, herself an artist. I enjoyed the goose-flesh of artistic pleasure; I knew that I was witnessing something great and beautiful. The poses were the perfection of the statuesque; the movements were of symphonic harmony; their feet were as winged; it was as if music and rhythm were one in harmony. Nor are they

limited to the classics; the Stravinskis, the Scriabines, the Rubensteins, the Fallas, they all belong to their domain. But their art is never barbaric, nor yet *baroque* or over-eccentric; it is a lofty art born of inspiration, and all the time one feels the amalgamation of Legat's master touch and Nicolaeva's almost hypnotic abandon. I thought of Nikisch and Gerhardt—that famous alliance now, alas, severed by fate. These twain were one, in the most exalted sense of the word. I came away in strange enthusiasm, and when I was out in the wilderness of Cricklewood, the prosiest of prosy suburbs, I could hardly believe that all the beautiful things I had seen were not of dreamland; the contrast was of distracting violence. Yet it was, fortunately, not chimera, but truth. There in the little drill-hall I had found tucked away in obscurity two of the greatest dancers alive, and I made up my mind to use this journal of light and leading to bring them into the open road to fame. For London cannot allow such artists to remain unknown. To produce them on one of our leading stages will be a revelation to the public as well as a treasure-trove to the manager who will be first in the field. For Legat and Nicolaeva are destined to shine in London as they did in pre-war days in Moscow and Petrograd.

IX

THE CRITICS' RIGHTS

Some time ago there was a discussion in one of our art papers anent the rights of admission of a critic to the theatre of a manager unwilling to welcome him for his candour. The opinions were very divided: some were in favour of the argument that the manager is the master in his own house; some held that the critic is a professional man whom to hamper would lead to an action for damages; others (in my opinion rightly) contended that a manager can decline to invite a critic or even to admit him on a free ticket indirectly obtained, but no manager could resist the "contract" with impunity if the unbidden critic had purchased his ticket at the box-office or at a library. But, after much parlance, and in the face of managers and the big Press, evidently reluctant to discuss the matter, the question remained unsolved, until the *Times* published the other day the judgment of the Court of Liège, which may not be binding on us, but is sure to be brought up whenever there is another passage at arms between the critic and manager. Here is the case as stated—

"A critic was excluded from a performance for which he had purchased a ticket in the usual way at the box-office. The Court held that a critic's freedom of speech was '*based upon a contract tacitly accepted by both actor and writer; and that a manager was not entitled to exclude a spectator who had paid for his seat.*' (The italics are mine,

for I have said ditto in the *Arts Gazette*.) Three hundred francs damages was awarded to the critic."

All of which is justice, common-sense, and a wholesome object-lesson. Only the punishment did not fit the crime. Three hundred francs—three guineas—is a ridiculous fine for artistic sabotage!

X

March 17th, 1923.

"THE PLAY-BOX" AT THE ST. MARTIN'S THEATRE

I HAVE just finished reading Mr. Basil Dean's spirited address to the young actors who are to form the company of the new theatrical enterprise, "The Play-Box," the afternoon theatre that is to open its gates in September next under his direction and that of Mr. Rea, his associate. And with Mr. Dean I cordially agree that, if practice be equal to the programme, there may arise the dawn of a new era for the British drama in the little house in West Street, which, despite its short career, has a record worthy of—aye, surpassing—the repute of many London theatres of older standing. For at the St. Martin's Theatre two Galsworthy plays, "The Skin Game" and "Loyalties," have each exceeded a run of a year—which is, indeed, a long span of life as one measures the vitality of plays. More than that: as both plays were of depth and of a serious trend, their success proves that the London public is not as stupid and inclined to the frivolous as it is often written down to be. Let me repeat what has been said time after time, that the London public is the most docile in the world, but in need of guidance. Its characteristic is that it is easily misled—that it has a sheep-like tendency to follow the leader whose bell tinkles loudest, and it is the leader who all too often thinks that he must stoop to conquer by pandering to the lower instincts, to the facile but effective, to the meretricious but glamorous, in order to fill his coffers. The under-estimation of our playgoers

is altogether a fallacy, as could be proved by drawing parallel columns of the records of plays by our great authors from Pinero to Shaw, compared with such stuff as "Little Bits of Fluff" are made of.

When I read the programme initiated by Mr. Dean, I see not only the brilliant ray of hope in the future, but I also find a very cogent answer to the question—or, rather, I should say to the plaint—concerning the capacities of our dramatists. How often does it not happen that a manager, or an actor or an actress about to start off their own bat, exclaim: "I have the theatre, I have the money, but where do I find the plays?" Whenever I hear that, "I should smile," as the American puts it.

The plays are there right enough. What is wanting is the finding of them, and, most important point of all, the encouragement needed for dramatists to carry on. How many plays of quality are rejected because the issues are either undecided or catastrophic instead of "a happy ending"?

Our commercial manager will always tell you that people, after the day's work, want to feel happy in the theatre and go home to happiness. But is it true? Is there not as much and more pleasure to be derived from a logical, if sad, ending than from that absurd finale of a reconciliation kiss which even the most unsophisticated playgoer in the gallery knows to be a sop to Cerberus, and merely the prelude to the misunderstanding which would begin once more immediately after the curtain has fallen, if the theatre were life?

There is as much enjoyment in the tear that wells up from the heart as in the guffaw brought forth by a farcical situation. Simple sentiment appeals to all sorts and conditions of men and women except the *blasé*, for whom no doctor has yet been able to find a remedy—except a

dose of hard labour. Thus I hope that, in the selection of his plays, Mr. Basil Dean will prove the leader he proclaims he will be, and that he will not, should things go none too well in the beginning, yield to compromise. Nor, I hope, will he be enticed by clique or fashion to lend a too willing ear to those who are always ready to blare " masterpiece " when a play is merely *précieux*. There is at least one foreign play in his list, which shall be unnamed for the present, which I regard with a little apprehension. But then, personally, I hate everything that is what the French call "*factice*." As I believe I can read human characters, so my experience has taught me to read the nature of plays. I feel at a glance that which is born from inspiration and that which is talent masquerading as genius in order to bamboozle its crowd and create proselytes among people who are always ready to follow Dame Fashion, whether she be ushered in by M. Paquin or by a playwright or a critic *à la mode*.

With regard to Mr. Dean's foreshadowed methods of production and ensemble, I feel wholly in accord with him. It is time that on our boards simplicity should take the place of meaningless luxury, so that the play and the spoken word may be the thing, and not the scenery and the furniture. That is why some three years ago I called attention in the *Illustrated London News* to that new and far-reaching innovation of Herr Hasait of Dresden, whereby one of the great economic questions of the theatre is solved by creating scenery through the projection of light on plain canvas, instead of wasting hundreds on paint-pot and palette. But, as usual when one proffers the egg of Columbus to our theatres, it is cast aside until " several years have elapsed," and some young man like Basil Dean, less conservative than the rest, thinks that it is worth while casting an eye across the Dover Straits instead of basking

in the stagnant comfort of insularity. For production and ensemble, then, one can have great expectations, since Basil Dean by his past and present work has proved that he is a man of imagination as well as a proficient stage-director. I piously hope that what he said in his address to his players —that the stars would often have to take the lesser parts in order to obtain a harmonious picture—may prove as felicitous in practice as it sounds like millennium in theory. The artistic temperament is averse from eclipse—even though it be but temporary and for the good of the cause. Meanwhile, here is good luck to "The Play-Box," which deserves a firm grip of the hand by all those good folk who never tire of telling their neighbours how much they love our theatre, and all too often prefer words to deeds!

XI

April 7th, 1923.

GLADYS COOPER'S MAGDA

After Miss Marie Löhr's Fédora comes Miss Gladys Cooper's Magda. What memories these plays conjure up! Memories of Duse and Sarah, and after—a long way after, though still wonderful—Mrs. Pat Campbell. I cannot help admiring our modern actresses who take up the challenge, for the plays have had their day. I know them backwards, and there is only one quality apart from associations with past triumphs that keeps them interesting. Their authors knew how to construct a play! Sudermann, the Dumas *fils* of Germany, may have written with his eye on stage effect. His plays may be what the French say "*du théâtre*," but you cannot deny their skill. That last act of "Magda," where the whole scale of emotions is touched—love, hate, defiance, terror, fear—is one that must test any actress, and to succeed completely sets a seal of greatness. You may say these plays will not stand analysis. It is true enough. It would be simple to pick their plots to pieces, but you must admit the playwright's adroitness. That itself is a kind of genius. To those who so readily produce the recipe I am tempted to say, "Here are gallipots full of ink, pens and paper. Try it. See what a corpse you will make! The recipe may be simple, but it is profound. Your failure will be profound yet simple." It is an ambitious bid for so young an actress. But Miss Gladys Cooper has imagination. Her Paula Tanqueray was a revelation. Her beauty so far has been her handicap. This time it will be an asset. Her Magda is an event, and I foretell a triumph.

XII

April 14th, 1923.

ABOUT SARAH BERNHARDT

I COULD write a book about her. About her greatness and—her follies; her cub; her coffin; her boxing the ears of the great Taillade, her horse-whipping Marie Colombier; her idolatry of her son Maurice and the fortune which it cost her; her marriage to Damala, Greek aristocrat, actor and morphinist; her affront to the German Minister who drank to "France" at a banquet, when she exclaimed: "*Toute la France, Excellence?*" (for it was after 1870); her defection from the Comédie Française; her quarrel with the lovely Croizette; her incredible efforts to make and fan *réclame;* her almost comic upholding of her "sovereignty" off the stage as well as on! Never shall I forget a little visit, years ago, to Boulevard Pereire: the ante-chamber where visitors lingered in waiting; the quaint noise next door as of *frou-frou*-ing gowns and shuffling feet; then folding doors flung apart as by magic; a figure in white on a gilded fauteuil; around her, in semi-circle, her secretaries, intimates, devotees; the confusion of the visitor, dazzled by this unexpected *mise en scène;* her graceful smile, her suavity of address, her witchery to make one feel as if a great queen were bestowing favours; her sublime acceptance of words of homage and her sudden bow to the next worshipper. It was very solemn at the moment, like so many things which Sarah did *pour la galerie*—all part and parcel of a policy which for decades has kept the world busy with gossip, yet indirectly always led to the aggrandisement of her renown.

For, as in most great personalities, there lived two souls in Sarah Bernhardt. In the intimacy of the family and a circle of friends there was no more delightful, womanly woman than this spoilt child of kings and nations. Then she was the typical *Française;* cordial, simple, vivacious, full of tenderness and consideration for her own, full of charm and simplicity towards those whom she knew to be abashed by her greatness and would make to feel at home. She always towered above her surroundings, but, especially as she grew in years, she would make efforts to suppress the superman in her; and she listened to the young with such benevolent patience as would urge them to give free rein to their thoughts, however opposed to hers, so that, as she put it, she could forget the calendar and fall into line with the growing race.

"To forget the calendar," that was the greatest of all favours showered upon this child of a family of eleven. She forgot it when, a mere girl, she triumphed in Coppée's "Passant" and made a poet as well as an actress. She forgot it when, for more than forty years, she conquered the world by her "Dame Aux Camélias," her Phèdre, her Queen in Victor Hugo's "Ruy Blas"; and would not abdicate these earliest honours until the surgeon's knife condemned her to sedentary rule. For, whatever may have been the splendour of her laurels in Fédora, Tosca, Théodora, Gismonda, Princesse Lointaine, Jeanne d'Arc, Aiglon, and the will-o'-the-wisp-like glamour of her Hamlet and Lorenzaccio, to us of the older generation there was but one monumental memory. It was her progress of the 'seventies of the last century, when from Paris she marched triumphantly through the Netherlands and set her pennant towards England, to become for ever an idol of our public, and—let it not be forgotten—a mighty ally in the development of the better understanding between the two nations.

To those who, like myself, saw, in their 'teens, Sarah Bernhardt's Phèdre, her Marguerite Gauthier, her Donna Sol, the sensation was indescribable. Revelation is not the word for it. Her voice; her majestic personality, powerful by its very frailty; her regal gesture; her metamorphosis into different beings of intense contrast; her sway by silence; her overwhelming magnetism, which seemed to stifle the very breath of the audience; her, to the youthful mind, sublime crystallisation of all that is embodied in the word "genius"—struck us with dumbness, anon to be released by vociferous ecstasy, to drive us to the stage-door and to unhorse her carriage that we might drag the conquering heroine through the streets, as in ancient Rome they greeted the victor.

Such enthusiasm may seem madness in retrospection. But was it? Were we mad to propel the chariot of genius when nowadays ten thousand troop round the window of a cinema star whose name one would not dare utter in the same breath as that of the greatest actress of a life-time? For that she was, and her only contemporary peers were Eleonora Duse and Clara Ziegler, the latter long since dead and unknown to the present generation of England, if she ever acted here at all. For, compared with Sarah in her Phèdre period, even Ristori, Wolter, and Réjane—to name a few whose vogue ran parallel—were of the second plane. So long as she appeared in drama worthy of her power, she stood alone on the peak. There was no voice so flexible in its prismatic power, no manner so imperious or so suave, no mentality so dominating by its penetration and manifestation of the human soul on its loftiest summits, in its tenderest nooks and darkest corners. Nor would I maintain that the Sarah Bernhardt of the Sardou period and all that followed, until during the war, in "Les Cathédrales," she once more ascended to the

august heights of the past, does not deserve to rank with her antecedents. That would be unjust as well as retrograde. To the younger generation of this country, Sarah, even to the last—save the painful farewell of 1921 in Verneuil's play—must have been the same revelation as to us of some decades ago. But there is this difference. We saw the bursting into flower; they, the younger, the second blooming. We by constant worship at her shrine learned the secrets of *métier*, perhaps the limitation of genius. That is the way (and perhaps the tragedy) of life, to say nothing of familiarity. But what of it? History will remember but one Sarah Bernhardt and that name will radiate on its scroll in indelible glory.

XIII

April 28th, 1923.

HOW REPUTATIONS ARE MADE

After all, there is something to be said for the French system of dramatic criticism which still prevails in journals of the *festina lente* dignity. Their critics do not criticise in a hurry, with the printer's devil hard at their heels. They go to the *répétition générale*, thence home to ponder and to clarify their impressions. They leave the hot gush from the first-night furnace to the *courriériste*, who rapidly reports how the play was received, the drift of the story and the outstanding achievements of the actors. A few days after, the critic whips in with his "considered judgment." He has time to ponder, to analyse, perhaps to rectify. If he takes his task *au serieux*, which is something else than even "seriously," he may have paid a second visit to the new play that matters; at any rate, we may assume that what he says is neither hasty nor influenced by the perfervid atmosphere of the *première*. Now, on our side, where criticism is looked upon as news and much writing has to be done against time, it is often felt that the pen is partly driven by the unseen hand of the public. In other words, it is possible that, if the critic had had time to make up his mind quietly, he would have expressed himself otherwise than under the spell of jubilation and all the other trappings supplied by the managerial gusto of the first night. It is not a reproach; it is a human peculiarity. Magnetism of the multitude is a mighty coil.

Yet how different may the expression be when the critic

has not been to the first night, but has gone to the theatre on an ordinary night, when enthusiasm is sporadic, and the curtain often more ready to rise after each act than is really warranted by the applause! With a free mind entirely unswayed by neighbourly comments, judgment becomes acute and dispassionate. It is not stimulated by extraneous influences. It is, as it were, built up by direct evidence; it becomes expressed by veracity, not by make-believe. If enthusiasm springs up and grows, it is genuine and will be proclaimed with conviction, not by "irresistible infection." The *réclame* may have blared; the manager may have forced it home by his assiduous Press agent that the play or the actor, or both, are of superlative merit—merit which the first-nighter all too often does not sift and merely endorses because he belongs to the sheep-like majority—but the true critic heeds it not. He holds quiet scales; he is not to be taken in by a flash in the pan; he will not echo—nor will he, if he is wise, speak of greatness or genius in the case of the actor after a first acquaintance, though a performance, say in America, may have been given hundreds of times and thereby have acquired a kind of virtuosity and technical perfection which, while dazzling, may be the outcome of practice and routine. Genius and greatness, like Rome, are not of one day's building. The artistic world is full of "geniuses" who had their reign of nine days' wonder and have since receded into obscurity. And as for greatness—rather, the adjective "great"—it has become as cheap as the Iron Cross, which once upon a time was a unique distinction, and in the turmoil of 1914 a meretricious bauble.

These reflections were prompted by the advent of an American actress whose "greatness" was for weeks dinned into our ears, as if new light were to illuminate our world of the theatre, as if all the actresses at home should take a

" back seat," as if her part could be played by her alone and by her only.

Well, she came. At the first night was " Hallelujah ! " If the lady believes all that has been said about her in demonstration and in print, she may well believe that she is the anointed successor of Sarah Bernhardt (who, by the way, after her *éclat* in " Le Passant," had to work and to fight for ten years until the French critics that mattered admitted her greatness).

Now, what did we behold on that evening of cool contemplation ? Greatness, genius, something beyond the horizon of some of our own actresses ? No ; we beheld a manifestation of consummate technique, of great assurance, of infinite resource of gesture and vocal acrobatics, a great sense of detail, a gift to embroider words as well as little acts with the adroitness of a conversationalist in a *salon* who knows how to fascinate by manner if not by meaning. Incidentally, we felt great possibilities : power, insight, the means of conveying the inner struggles of the soul. But technique overwhelmed spontaneity, and we came away in the spirit of the Spanish poet's young swain : " She appears very lovable, but can I love her for that she is more lovable than others ? " In plain English, Miss Pauline Lord has conquered by the mastery of craft. Her art we shall not be able to appraise until we have seen her in a creation untrammelled by a long American record. Meanwhile, I say " Anna Christie " would have had no less success if the heroine had been played by one of our own actresses.

XIV

May 5th, 1923.

WHY "ANGELO" AND "TRESPASSES" FAILED

WHEN on all sides you hear the words "failure" and "dulness," even the most open-minded spectator would be forgiven for being accessible to prejudice. Rarely have the words been flaunted so broadcast: even on the promenade on the Riviera they were echoed by English people perusing the newly arrived London papers. Still, I wanted to see for myself, and, firmly determined to judge by my own impressions, I followed the wisdom of Ulysses, and sealed my ears with imaginary wax of independence.

The funereal gauze curtain which floated over the orchestra was surely an unhappy preparation; nor was the Egyptian darkness into which the house became plunged apt to raise one's spirits. But after the opening scene, when Angelo appeared and the tale of his artistic tribulations materialised in the pictures, interest awakened. What was said did not matter; the *tableaux vivants* told it all. And beautiful were some of the visions: the composer's musing in the Eldorado garden; his meeting with the sweet maiden and her old-fashioned parents; the interference of the demon-like monk; the migration to the court; the cabal; the interrupted rehearsal; the anger of the composer; at length the triumph of his work, the apotheosis when "flights of angels" sang his glory. It was all very eerie, at times dramatic. It would never have

been dull if Miss Macgill had not been so colourless, and Moscovitch, excellent as the composer with his Beethoven mask in middle age, had realised love's young dream. I thought of Henry Ainley when he created Quinney.

In the *entr'acte* I met a young English writer who had seen the play once or twice in Berlin, and he agreed with me in appreciation of Arthur Collins' production. It was as impressive as in the land of origin. Yet there the play was a success, and here it was doomed from the first.

Why? One of the causes we have indicated. Except in the case of Mr. Gerald Lawrence, whose Mephistophelian figure was both tense and ominous, the acting was flat. It lacked inspiration. The chief error, however, was one of selection. To the Germans—perhaps to other foreign people with whom the history of opera is a study of interest—the career of Kreisler (for that was the original title) meant something. There was a historical foundation for the play. But who and what is Angelo to us? He has no *raison d'être;* we do not care about his personality or his tribulations. Opera is but a passing event in our world, not a national institution whose every movement agitates public opinion. Our musical life is only just awakening, and it is not unfair to say that even the triumph of our greatest composers would not stir our public, let alone create such cabals and upheavals as in olden days became pages of history in Teutonic lands.

So what happened was this: our playgoers went to see a new play of which wonderful stories were circulated beforehand. What they saw fascinated them at moments, although, for want of lucid explanation by dialogue, they did not always quite "take in" what they saw; and, since what they heard was spasmodic, more introductory to the pictures than coherent and dramatic; since the characters, of whose significance they knew nothing, were

shadowy; since there was a total absence of humour—they were, to put it plainly, "most honourably bored." Before transplanting "Kreisler" to Drury Lane, the rulers of the theatre should have considered whether the play was the thing, and remembered that Berlin and London are as far apart as the Poles.

* * * * * *

Mr. Edward Percy, the author of "If Four Walls Told," that happy, Sunday-born play, has tasted the bitter cup. After five days, his second effort, "Trespasses," has been withdrawn from the Ambassadors' Theatre, and thus rendered vain the efforts of the author and of capable players, headed by Mr. Lyn Harding and Miss Ethel Griffiths, who, as a Victorian dame of grand manners and rigid principles, rose to fame. It often occurs that an uncommonly successful firstling is followed by a failure. Many authors have experienced such an unexpected reverse. Of the theatre, with its fitful ways, it may be said that it is not always the *premier pas* that matters, but the next. And, in the case of Mr. Percy, the defeat was doubly cruel, for "Trespasses" was by no means a bad play. It was too long; it was in its development somewhat theatrical; but it had great qualities of dialogue, and—no small merit—it gave a fairly true and very interesting picture of City life. Also, it had a daring and logical unhappy ending—unhappy in the sense of the average playgoer's hoping for a reconciliation between the elderly husband and the young wife who had fallen in love with his partner, and went away with him to start a new life. But the finale was but the *coup de grâce;* the real cause of the failure was that business plays generally spell ruin on the stage. Even a fine American play, "The Lion and the Mouse," with a

memorable performance by Edward Breese, after phenomenal success in the States, died prematurely in London; and Sir Herbert Tree could hardly obtain a *succès d'estime* with the famous "Business is Business," by Octave Mirbeau. The truth is that our people, mainly occupied by business all day and every day, want to get away from the money-making atmosphere in the theatre, and do not appreciate the effort, however dexterous, to show how money is made.

I, who have devoted a lifetime to the City, and who not only admired but was engrossed in Mr. Percy's skilful reproduction of office life, of market manipulations, of speculative machinations, of the business man at work and at home, found the play intensely interesting. I felt the earnest intentions of the author; I enjoyed the true ring of the City part of the story. But the fact remains that the average playgoer is bored by business in the theatre; that he does not understand the portent of the events placed before him; that he is wearied by details of contracts, futures, fluctuations, and devices of "bulling and bearing." A "spec." in linseed for a rise, or one in "shellac" for a fall, excites him not. It is caviare (or indifferent) to him; it sounds Greek—so much so that somebody near me, a lady, asked her neighbour: "What is shellac?" and "What does all this mean?" But such is the general knowledge of the public. I remember another famous play, by America's best playwright of the time, Bronson Howard. It was called "The Henrietta," and when it came to London, it was predicted that it would be the talk of the town. There was a great scene in which the ticker of the Exchange Telegraph announced a change of fortune while the hero lay dead in his office. The Press sang praises, but the public would not have it.

For this was a Stock Exchange play, and all about contangos and rise and fall, things about which the majority knew nothing—or perhaps too much, to their cost. And so it failed, in spite of great merits. So let Mr. Percy take heart of grace. His is merely a brilliant failure. He is a victim of circumstance.

XV

May 12th, 1923.

ENEMIES OF THE THEATRE

When one hears of the enemy of the theatre, the first thought is of the Censor, the next of the so-called "Non-conformist conscience." The latter, difficult to locate, may remain undiscussed, the more so as there is a progressive *rapprochement* between the Church and the Stage. The former, the Censor, much assailed at the beginning of the century, shows such latitude that he may be considered nowadays as a guardian against licence, instead of an obstruction to liberty. Nor do we hear latterly the old cry, "Abolish the Censor!" for the very good reason that if the Lord Chamberlain were to lose his control we should come under the heel of the police, and what that means can only be realised by those familiar with the procedure abroad. Heyermans in Holland, Schnitzler in Vienna (and Berlin), could unfold such tales as would make us feel happy under our present régime, governed not only by the Lord Chamberlain and the Reader of Plays, but by a council of men of the theatre, from whom liberality of views may be reasonably expected.

But there is another enemy within the gates, and that is the Law, which administers a different sauce to the goose and the gander. To put it in a few words: You may go to a concert hall or cinema on Sundays and pay at the door; but if you wish to go to the theatre on Sundays, you must be a member of a society. Of the technical reasons for differentiation we have no cognisance; but the fact is

patent, and it stands in the way of progress. Take, for instance, the case of the Shakespeare Fellowship, a band of enthusiastic young actors who, under the presidency of Mr. Arthur Bourchier, have clubbed together to devote their day of leisure to the worship of the Bard for the benefit of the people.

Now, the object of the Fellowship is Shakespearean propaganda at such prices as would meet the purses of the working classes. If the doors were open to the passer-by—and the box-office during the week—that would be easy and practicable. Many people dislike being bound by dates, and prefer to go to the theatre on the spur of the moment. Moreover, subscription means the paying of a—to some—not inconsiderable sum down; or, if it were payable in instalments, a costly administration, postage, etc. Unless much money is expended to reach the millions of the Metropolis, the subscribers are likely to remain limited in number, for the very simple reason that the majority do not know what is going on in the great city. Abroad, where they do these things better, the success of the People's Theatre is due to the possibility of buying seats anywhere at any time. Result, that the throng attends at such low prices as to make the two ends meet and a little over. On subscription, and having regard to the demands of the stage-hands, such a happy issue is fairly doubtful.

Of course, the law being a "hass," it is possible to pull its tail. When, some thirty years ago, we opened the Royalty Opéra Comique for Sunday entertainments in defiance of the law, we found a back-door. We made the nearest tobacconist or sweet-shop keeper a member of our society, and, as the Statutes ordained that any member could buy tickets *ad lib.*, it soon became bruited abroad how and where the tickets were obtainable. So all those who were not in a position to subscribe simply went "next door" and got

what they wanted. It is a humiliating situation. The concert, cinema, to say nothing of the "pub.," are Everyman's domain on Sundays; the theatre can only be opened by stratagem.

Surely it is time to break with these remnants of die-hard national conservatism. Here is a chance for a Labour M.P. to make a name by pressing a claim which is a public need of the classes as well as the masses.

XVI

May 19th, 1923.

"THE MACHINE WRECKERS" (BY ERNEST TOLLER)—THE PEOPLE'S THEATRE

"MORE light," was Goethe's dying word. And it was prophetic of his country's future. Germany, whence in its great poet's day the light came by the torch of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, is wallowing in darkness. It has lost faith in itself, in the world, in the future, in life. The drift of its literature is despair, unless it be revenge. It spreads hopelessness, rebellion, destruction. The old cry of "To-morrow we may not be able to live, thus let us live to-day!" has changed into "Let us undo to-day! We have nothing worth living for, so let us spend and cast away—the deluge is upon us."

In Toller's play, "The Machine Wreckers," which Mr. Ashley Dukes has rendered into exquisite Victorian English —the stately language of an age when oratory was in flower and purity, undefiled by bastard words—we have woeful Germany of to-day under the mask of England in 1812. From the very beginning it is symbolic, when, in an expressive scene in the House of Lords, Byron inveighs against the Machine Bill threatening death to destroyers, and Castlereagh defends the Bill and the penalty on the plea of common-sense. Byron is the symbol of the submerged people, of the over-taxed and under-fed—a survival of that idealism which in 1914 received its death-blow. Castlereagh is the

symbol of the capitalists who now, while the country is in the slough of despond, are the covert rulers. The whole play is an indictment of capitalism—a bitter, relentless, unsparing attack; and its message is that when the masses are purblind and obsessed by an idea it is useless to preach moderation and insight. Reason goes to the wall—reason will be silenced. When the action unfolds and describes the revolt of the starving weavers against the introduction of machines and consequent unemployment, there is but one man in the frenzied throng who sees "light" and would lead to it. He himself is a tramp and hungering, but he sees that destruction as a remedy is worse than the evil of unemployment and its aftermath. He would adjure his fellow-sufferers to stand firm, but to temporise—to wait and see. For he feels that the *impasse* of the moment is but temporary. Anon, when the machines are at work in full force, industry, trade, credit—all will flourish, a wave of prosperity will flood the land, and myriads more hands will be needed than ever before. But the purblind heed him not; and when they discover that he is the brother of the overseer at the factory they stone him as a traitor. Once more the saver pays with his life for the fruits of enlightenment. Then the troops come, and the wreckers are, in their turn, to meet their reward. What does it matter? They have achieved their end—destruction! There is nothing to live for; we may as well die on the gallows or in prison.

It is excessively painful, this play of "Dis-Kultur"; it is complex, involved, so much so that only with the greatest difficulty can even those who know the German mentality of to-day extract its real *raison d'être* from a maze of speeches, phrases, incidents, and upheavals. Hauptmann, with infinitely more talent and with greater sobriety of method, has told the same tale in "The Weavers," that famous

"J'Accuse" against the capitalist and the sweater. But Hauptmann was direct and coherent in his tragedy; his people were human; their sufferings penetrated the hearers' hearts and souls. Toller's people are not characters of inwardness; they are but the means to illustrate a cause. Their ravings and woes are disturbing, but they do not move us beyond the moment: their vehemence overwhelms their force. It is what the Germans themselves call a "Tendenz-Stück"—a play with a purpose—and the purpose has so beset his vision that he does not see clearly himself, and drowns in words his power of projection. When it is all over we have the feeling that we have heard a man with a mission, whose soul is so deeply stirred, whose head is so full of whirling ideas, whose craving to coerce us with conviction is so ardent, that he misses when firing. We can but repeat what we said of the Insect-play, that other typical post-war drama of despair—*Cui bono?* We have heard nothing new; we have once more had it dinned into our ears that life is misery, and perhaps futile. But what *is* the good of it? To revel in the slough of despond may be the sad pleasure of the few, but the world wants something different to carry on. Such plays may have an ephemeral value as curiosities—as a manifestation of the mental state of Germany to-day—but they are merely typical of a passing phase, and a repetition of such cries of despair as are born from the agonies of crisis.

Having said this, there remains but an expression of indebtedness to the Stage Society for having attempted this ambitious production; to Mr. Nugent Monck, of the Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich, for his guiding hand, so firm, so simple in choice of means, so telling in effect; and to the phalanx of well-known actors, among whom is Mr. Herbert Marshall, the hero, the victim of the drama,

excellent by such magnificence of diction that the character will be remembered when the play will rest in quietude with many other products of "storm and stress."

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On the 28th of this month there will be an interesting ceremony at Mr. Rosenthal's handsome Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel. Then the foundation-stone will be laid of a new enterprise, "The People's Theatre." At present it is not intended to go further than the creation of the frame. Whether the flag will ever wave on the roof depends on public support. We have the plans, we have the plays, we have the people too; we have confidence in our engineer, Mr. A. E. Filmer. But our means, except an inexhaustible fund of enthusiasm, a little knowledge, and a small sum wherewith to begin, are very limited. We are doing this for the people, and we hope that the people will be with us. Already Toynbee Hall and its leaders are moving to rally their followers in support. We feel sure that the intelligent Hebrew population will be eager to welcome our efforts. We have cut the prices to fit Everyman's purse. For three-and-sixpence we offer stalls as commodious and comfortable as any in the West End; for the nimble ninepence we throw open a gallery the like of which is to be found nowhere else in the Great City; and, mindful that the play's the thing, as well as the players, we have planned a repertory for a start which by its very choice must commend itself to every playgoer who seeks in the theatre something better than amusement to kill time—something to appeal to his intellect, mind, and his outlook on life. "The Witch," from the Danish, by John Masefield; "You Never Can Tell," by Bernard Shaw; Ibsen's "Ghosts"; Teixeira's version of Zola's "Thérèse Raquin"—these are the foursome of our first month. Then, if our hopes are not

blighted, we have an arsenal behind us: British plays deserving rehearing; Continental plays hitherto withheld from London despite their fame abroad; new plays by some of the younger generation which would not appeal, perhaps, to the commercial theatre, but should be heard because their authors have something to say in the spirit of new lamps for old. As for the players, we have enlisted for a time the services of Mr. Ernest Milton, whose Hamlet at the Old Vic brought him fame, and ranks as a creation of memorable originality; of Miss Phyllis Relph, far too little known in London as an actress of power and personality; of Mr. Orlando Barnett, whose name is as familiar to every playgoer as Mr. Campbell Gullan's, who also has promised to be one of us. Others still remain unnamed so far, for theirs is the opportunity to make their name themselves. We have chosen the young who are ambitious to make good for the cause and for themselves, and who, confident in their producer, Mr. A. E. Filmer, devote themselves with heart and soul to their mission. I say "mission" designedly, for the actors as well as the sponsors of the People's Theatre seek no other gain than the right to live and such prestige as will further their career, and, by individual effort, assist to consolidate the enterprise.

Thus we may say with conviction that on the artistic side everything will be done to make the People's Theatre worthy of its name. But the last word remains with the people themselves. Will they let us live? That is the question. Will they fortify our belief that a people's theatre on this side of the Thames is as much needed as on the other bank, where the Old Vic has succeeded *per aspera ad astra?* We want the help of all who love the theatre; and, as we are working for a great cause, we are not ashamed to raise and proffer our hat to all who can afford and are

willing to support, with the humble prayer and assurance that by Mr. Graham Morrison, the manager of the People's Theatre, Pavilion Theatre, Whitechapel Road, "even the smallest contributions will be gratefully received" and wielded under careful stewardship.

XVII

May 26th, 1923.

VIRGIN SOIL—THE LEEDS ART THEATRE

Ours is the greatest Colonial Empire in the world, yet as far as dramatic literature is concerned it remains practically unexplored—a virgin soil. It is a tax on memory to recall plays dealing with life in India and the Dominions beyond the seas. Many years ago Haddon Chambers, in his famous firstling, "Captain Swift," gave us glimpses of Australia, but it was mainly Australian sidelights seen in a London drawing-room; Somerset Maugham, in "The Land of Promise," depicted Canadian settlers with some fidelity; James Fagan, in "The Wheel," produced the first serious drama of India which acquainted us fairly realistically with the conditions under which our soldiers and Civil Servants live, and the eerie influence of the native priests. There have been scores of cow-boy plays, but their quality was merely pictorial, their tendency melodramatic—generally a case of the clothes and the canvas-made play. This poor harvest is all the more remarkable since other nations possess a Colonial drama. Holland, for instance, had, as long as forty years ago, a playwright named Brooshooft who wrote a series of plays on life in Java, which, in spite of a kind of mechanical construction, shed much light on the relationship between the European and the Malay. Fabricius, in these days, has written both comedies and dramas dealing with subjects showing how, in the Tropics, the average Dutchman sheds his skin and becomes a different person under the influence of the sun and his daily contact with a

race in every way the antithesis of the Dutch. Claude Farrère, one of the most interesting novelists of modern France, has told in "Fumée d'Opium," "Les Civilisées," and other works often dramatised, how the French act as colonisers—and the picture is often more candid than flattering. As for the Americans, their repertory abounds in plays with Cuba, Manila, and Mexico as setting; but it would be left to Eugene O'Neill to raise the subject to the environment. Such American-Colonial plays as we have seen (or read) generally produce the impression that the author writes from hearsay, from books he has read or pictures he has seen, and constructs his story from a Broadway angle. It is second-hand drama, not the genuine outcome of personal knowledge and observation.

There is thus an enormous field for the traveller endowed with dramatic instinct. For what do we know of Jamaica and the rest of the West Indies, of Fiji, of East Africa, and, I might add, of the social life of Canada? Is there a single play extant dealing with the last-named beyond cow-boys, shack, and ranch? Yet all the lands under our rule have a history, a population, a folklore, a variety of customs of life which would offer wonderful opportunities for an alert mind to see and record something new, to break away from the rut of convention.

Of course, the end is not achieved by a mere trip, a hasty survey. The times are past when a French journalist who had been one hour in Dover on a rainy day and saw a red-haired girl wrote home: "In England it always rains and the girls mostly have red hair," which his editor printed without demur and the people took *au sérieux*. Travel has changed all that—and it is to the traveller and to the writers in our Colonial Press that we must look for the tilling of the virgin soil. But encouragement is needed. We at home care far too little for, and (unless we are professionally

connected with our Colonies) know next to nothing of, Greater Britain across the seas. That the interest can be created is proved by the efforts of our Indian Play Society in London, efforts which would gain by organisation and careful preparation. But that is only one step in the right direction. What we want is a manager who will lead, by promising his support to the young dramatist devoting his energies to Colonial life. In doing so, he would not only widen our horizon, but, from a material point of view, reap the benefit of his enterprise. For the field is vast and of infinite possibilities.

* * * * * *

I had a chat the other day with Mr. Charles Smith, the originator, with Mr. Ramsden, of the Leeds Art Theatre. From very modest beginnings—a performance of a modern play—they have built up an institution which is likely to last and make the North familiar with the modern drama of intelligence and progress—the drama from Tchekoff and Strindberg to Hoffmannsthal and the younger playwrights of England and Ireland. I asked Mr. Smith how he managed to carry on after his first performance; for, as usual when the pioneer sets sail in his argosy of good hope, there is an inexhaustible fund of enthusiasm and no cash. And this is how he did it: A few fellow-lovers of the non-commercial drama banded together and supplied the slender munition for the first start. They appealed to amateurs willing to work—and the amateurs flocked in. They appealed to Edith Craig, the gifted producer (London shall never be forgiven for letting her well-known Pioneers' Society go under for lack of a few hundred pounds—and that in spite of a growing list of patrons of "gentry and nobility"). She responded. Then invitations were sent out to possible subscribers—people who profess a certain interest in the progress of the theatre, and may be tempted after tasting.

Success emboldened their efforts, and after the send-off the campaign began in earnest. One can do these things better and cheaper in a provincial centre than in London. A letter in the leading paper read by all sounds the clarion. Circulars go forth to members of the philosophical, literary, and kindred societies. The telephone-book—funny but practical thought—was fingered, and from it culled a list of names of promise. In London it would cost a good many pounds; in Leeds it was a matter of so many pennies and a circular. The result was more than gratifying. With a maximum subscription of one pound for a series of performances, and a few shillings as minimum, no less than £900 was gathered for the forthcoming season. And as the pound subscribers were the great minority, it may be safely calculated that the membership goes into thousands. What are we to think of it, when we recall that in its palmiest days our Independent Theatre, the "Grannie" of all these pioneering theatres, never had a greater revenue than £450 per season, and the Stage Society £1500? And this in London—not Leeds!

Again, there came support from an unexpected quarter. The directors wanted to do a miracle play by Hoffmannsthal in fitting surroundings. Their eye fell on a disused church under the sceptre of the Bishop of Ripon. They boldly applied to the Bishop, who made careful inquiries concerning the nature of the play, and finally granted his sanction. Thus in Leeds a great thing has been achieved by the *entente* between Church and Stage. Nor will the first step remain single. Maeterlinck's "Sister Beatrice" will no doubt follow; and at Christmas, triplets from Laurence Housman's pen.

But the great and significant feature of the Leeds Art Theatre will be its practically entire equipment by amateurs. Only in cases of extraordinary histrionic demands will the professional be called in. This theatre, under its artistic

guidance, will derive its life-force from people who devote their leisure to the cult of the theatre. They are bound to rehearse as conscientiously and regularly as any professional; they will seek no reward except the highest recognition. They will attempt the highest form of the drama; and, under the safe stewardship of Edith Craig, who is as hopeful and enthusiastic as her staunch henchmen, Messrs. Smith and Ramsden, there is every prospect of performances worthy of the cause.

Wherefore, three cheers for Leeds! And wake up, London! For in the Great City there is nothing like the Art Theatre of Leeds except in Golders Green, and that is practically not London, but a Free State of Art far away from the barren centre!

XVIII

June 2nd, 1923.

TEMPERAMENT AND TECHNIQUE

I HAVE seen a few comedies lately, and, as the plays were of no importance, my attention was more than ever riveted on the acting. And this was the paramount impression: Our men are, on the whole, excellent, and often in the smaller parts there is such neatness of characterisation, such clever elaboration of detail, such a keen interest in the play, shown by gentle gestures, by expression of feature, by smile and glance, that one asks, "Why are these true artists relegated to the second plane? Why does no one follow them up and give them the chance of a lifetime?" Sometimes these players, usually herded together in criticism as "the rest of the cast," with a couple of laudatory adjectives, are the most arresting figures on the canvas. They are not merely *obbligato* violinists to the star; they enliven the background to such an extent that they become of material importance. Indeed, more than once have we carried away the thought that, but for the interpretation of the secondary parts, there was really very little worth mentioning. This is not necessarily the fault of the principals, but may be due to the author, who applies *cliché* to hero and heroine, and, being by nature a miniature-painter, devotes his chief attention to the types he has seen in life and snapped up in his mental camera.

Now, curiously enough, this quality of minor characterisation is as frequent among our actors as it is rare among our actresses. Time after time women flit through a piece

who attract by their gowns, deliver their bits of dialogue, commingle with the other players, and remain uninterested lay-figures. It may not be so on the first night, when the excitement of the moment stirs one and all, but it is certainly the case during the run and at matinées. Then there is a strange contrast. The men of small parts are as alert, keen, busy as ever; but some of the women simply walk through their parts, and, when they have nothing to say, might just as well be away from the stage, so dead are they, so aloof, so outside the action. With some it is a question of inexperience; with some the jog-trot of doing one's little bit, that being all that is required; with the majority, I fear, it is absence of temperament.

They do not see a play steadily and whole. They leave the motion of the machine to the big cog-wheels; they are not alive to the fact that every part is a unit, something vital that should be alive. Nor do they realise that the stage's main force is magnetism, and that every personality, every eye, every attitude, passive or active, contributes to the galvanising effect. To be out of the picture, to show no interest, to occupy oneself with the audience, instead of feeling, living, harmonising with the other players, is to "cut the current," to mar the action, to depress the atmosphere. These little actresses, so charming to behold and so empty in their doings, would burst with laughter if one told them the story of the old mummer who said that he had laid all his heart and soul into his one line, "My Lord, the carriage is waiting" (which in some plays in a moment of crisis would be an announcement of ominous portent). They would laugh at the idea that a French actress made her reputation by the utterance of one word. It was in the days of Legouvé, and to him came a young actress of some experience, with tears in her eyes, praying for a chance. "Test me in any way you like," she said,

"and I will show you what I am capable of." "Very well," said Legouvé; "I will give you two words, and I will let you express these words in four circumstances of life. If you sense it rightly, you shall have a part." He chose the words "Come here." Then he described to her four dramatic situations—joy, sorrow, suspense, relief. At the end of each description she had merely to say, "Come here." The sound, the inflection, the vibration of her voice would reveal whether she understood, whether she felt rightly. She came through the ordeal triumphantly, and Legouvé gave her, a little later, a leading part in one of the plays he wrote with Scribe. Her name was, if I remember well, Denoyer, and she was for many years not only a well-known actress, but a much-sought-after teacher of elocution. When she was asked how it was that she stood the great trial, she answered, "Because in my days of struggle I understudied all the parts of my leaders; so during the play I went with them through all their emotions: thus I learnt to be not only of the play, but always in it. I learned the meaning of the eloquence of silence, and often my leaders told me that my eager interest, the expression of my eyes and features, inspired them."

There is a great deal in these simple words. We are all influenced by surroundings—which notion may commend itself to the little actresses on our stage.

XIX

June 9th, 1923.

THE MOTH AND THE CANDLE—AN ARTISTIC ERROR

Has the outside world, I wonder, any conception of the terrible fight for life going on day by day in the World of the Theatre? We hear of bad business, of bad plays, of the plaint of the Great Unacted, and the closed doors. Incidentally, we hear of inflated rents, of the presumptions of labour, of the wicked theatre-tax, about which the manager weeps while the public pays—is it not plainly printed on the tickets?

But what we hear all too rarely is of the suffering in silence of the army of unemployed in an overstocked profession. Whenever the papers announce a new play, and a new venture, every post brings a sheaf of letters asking, praying, imploring for work. And alas! since there are more women in the land (and on or about the stage) than men, they form the majority of the pleaders. A well-known manager, who let me into the secrets of his cupboard, one morning showed me a pile of letters with an index attached. I rapidly counted fifty and more. "This is one day's sad harvest." He is a kind-hearted man, who looks upon his less fortunate colleagues in the spirit of *esprit de corps*, and believes that, even when there is no chance to offer immediate employment, it is part and parcel of his duty to see all the applicants—to visualise their possibilities with a view to later plans; to proffer a word of encouragement, maybe of solace. He himself has gone through the mill, and tasted the bitter cup of "resting"—willy-nilly—with

no work and no money. He remembers closed doors, abrupt interviews while kept standing like a menial, the rebuffs—all those disappointments which depress a heavy heart. Besides, he is not only kind, he is far-seeing; he knows the value of personal acquaintance and observation; he considers that in declining to see an artist he may let a genius pass his door, and regret it ever after. It happens all too often that an artist leaps suddenly into fame, and that then, too late, a manager remembers how the first claim on his or her services was offered to him and declined on the stereotyped circular containing a polite "Nothing doing."

But, on the whole, it may be said that the manager referred to is rather the exception than the rule. Generally only the fewest unemployed actors get near the holy shrine. Nor can one blame the leaders of theatres that they politely turn a deaf ear; for to see, say, fifty people but for five minutes every day means a little matter of over four hours, or precisely one-half of normal working-time. The whole sad question is not one of individual shortcomings, but the obvious result of three causes. The first is our system of engagements for a run. It is unique in Europe. Elsewhere, all the artists are engaged for a definite period at a certain time of the year. The artists go to agents; the agents are, as it were, the permanent brokers of a manager; supply is equalled by a pretty regular demand. Artists out of engagements are rare on the Continent; such are either the more or less notoriously incapable ones, or those who feel confident that they can dispense with long engagements and do better as "guests" spasmodically. The next cause is that resting players rarely hear of new enterprises and requirements until after the event, when the play and the cast are settled. They apply on rumour, hearsay, or possibly little sidelights in the Press. There is no labour exchange for artists, nor yet any information bureau. Even

the Actors' Association and the accredited agents know nothing of what is going on in the managerial office. The latter are sent for when they are wanted, but generally engagements are made by the manager himself, with the aid of the author, who both know exactly whom they want and where to find them. And lucky indeed are the protégés who get in by recommendation. The rest wander outside in darkness, and chance is the only "bull" point in their speculation of something looming up.

Yet, when all is said, the third cause is the most cogent of them all. The stage is the candle that attracts the moth, particularly the female moth—the girl who is idle and bored at home; the girl who is tired of "five o'clocks" and society; the girl who reads about the glories and the luxurious lives of stars; the girl who has failed at several trades and thinks that the stage is as good a gamble as any other; the girl who is indolent and good-looking, and thinks that stage-life is all outings, excitement, and *dolce far niente;* the girl who has acted as an amateur and been praised as a genius by sisters, cousins, aunts—not forgetting swains; the girl who thinks that the stage is a good matrimonial bureau—have not Topsy and Dolly hooked a millionaire or a title—the girl who has had elocution lessons and thinks that she is "it," and could—if she had but a chance—become a Gladys Cooper or a Madge Titheradge; the girl who thinks that she has it in her, that the stage is her vocation, whereas in reality she would be better employed as a wife and mother. Now, if you were to tell the truth to all these more or less useless hangers-on, they would be horrified and full of protestation. But the fact remains, and, if it applies in a lesser degree to men, it is because our men are fewer in number and generally more adequate than the would-be actresses swarming round stage-doors and theatre offices. It is one of those problems that defy solution, and will

grow in fatal importance as the theatre, financially far from sound and less and less lucrative, becomes more and more the focus of the attention of public and Press.

Would that there were more managers like one, now dead, who had a hard-and-fast rule with applicants whom he considered as ballast! His first question to the aspirants who came to him in shoals was: "Why do you want to go on the stage? Is it of necessity or because you believe you can act and would like to employ your time?" By the answer he could at once gauge what manner of person was facing him. And nine times out of ten he dismissed his visitor with the polite salute: "Yours is a case of "may," not "must." I'm sorry. I am a man of business and cannot afford to attend to other people's recreations. Forgive me, and—good morning." His was the cruelty of kindness, and he thus rendered great service to the real workers in his profession.

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With all my love for the little people of the Marionettes, I think their incursion into Shakespeare is an error. There is a general consensus of opinion that the best part of the entertainment was not the play of "The Tempest," but the scenery and the music, and that moments of mirth were followed by periods of gentle *ennui*. The fault lay not so much with the wire-pullers as with the henchmen. When the Marionettes opened in opera and met with the enthusiasm kindled by a quaint novelty, there was a feeling of unevenness. Italian operators and English operatic artists, engaged for the purpose, formed a strange combination indeed, and one that could never be complete on account of temperament and lack of real cohesion. The fascination of the old Punch and Judy show is that the pipers call the tune—in other words, manipulator and actor are one. Nor can perfect harmony of time and *milieu* ever be obtained when

these two are sundered. There is a fundamental difference between the beat of mechanism and the human voice, and the make-believe can only be achieved by such practice as reaches very nearly amalgamation. In "The Tempest" there was very little of that: the Marionettes were Latin in the wide sense of the word; the accompanists, vocal and reciting, were, I will not say Anglo-Saxon, but—otherwise, and hardly ever did the poetry of Shakespeare penetrate.

Again if our public had been familiar with the art and possibilities of Marionettes, if they had seen the Munich puppets at work in Goethe's "Faust," in Shakespeare, and other classical work, moved and voiced simultaneously by actors—and actors only—they would not have been quite so rapturous over Italian young visitors, or there would have been programmes less ambitious and more apt. For it is in "variety" that they excel; their acrobats, their *prime donne* in mockery and miniature, their wire-walkers—above all, their skeleton juggling, with its own head and bony limbs—show the perfection and the humour of their art. If they want to do opera and classics, let it be in Italian. We don't ask Duse to play in English for us; so why should we not be allowed to enjoy the Marionettes as they really are, instead of practising futile naturalisation on their artistic nature?

XX

June 16th, 1923.

MABEL RUSSELL, M.P.—THE RIGHT TO "BOO"!

MABEL RUSSELL, actress, M.P.! What would our late revered Queen Victoria, what would the Victorian Era, what would the whole world (including America) have said if it had happened fifty years ago? The wildest imagination of a novelist, the humour of all our cartoonists and chartered wits could not have conjectured it. It would have been considered the Miracle of Miracles. And here she is, this wonderful girl—for no more than that is she to look at—who will tell us one day the interesting and peculiar story of her self-made rise in the theatrical world, and who stepped into the breach—the pen almost whips out "breeches"—for her husband, conquered his seat, and is to-day the most-talked-of—and perhaps, among her sex, envied—woman in London.

Yes, she is a wonderful girl; and well may she deserve the *sobriquet* of "London Pride," which was the title of the play that forever made her name as a comédienne and the darling of the public. She had done much hard and capital work before that. Rising from the ranks, reversing all sorts of paths in the facile region of musical comedy, she made her first real hits in "The Merry Widow" as Fi-Fi, and, later, in "The Dollar Princess." Her vivacity, her agreeable assurance, her unsparing energy, her mobile personality, her eyes, so 'cutely set (as the Americans might say), so full of gaiety and sparkle, lifted her in the smallest part beyond the multitude. And then came a real opportunity—the

character of the decoy-duck in "Within the Law," an American play more or less Anglicised to suit London's taste. Mabel Russell made this strange character frankly Cockney: she made us think of all the romances of costerland, where "'Arriet" is idolised, the buttons shine, and the "moke" is a sacred animal. Her performance was "'Ampstead 'Eath" in *excelsis*, with the good heart beating furiously under the coat of lax manners and crooked methods. It was an admirable achievement, and led to the parlance of a "Mabel Russell part." Then, as hinted above, came her great evening—great for her as well as for the authors, Gladys Unger and Neil Lyons—"London Pride"; and had she not married again, the London theatre would have never been without its "Mabel."

Now she has sought fresh woods and pastures new, and those who know, as I do, her alert intellect, her kindness, her gift of observation, her interest in women and children, her freedom of speech, her independence of opinion, are convinced that at Westminster she will soon be as brilliant a player as she was at the Haymarket and Wyndham's. For she is a woman in the finest sense of the word, and her womanliness has remained unspoiled by success or by the knowledge and struggle of life.

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The Paris Press is once more discussing the old question of "to boo or not to boo"—or rather "to whistle," for it is the way of the Parisian malcontents to utter a sibilant noise through pursed lips, whereas our opposition (rarely, I am glad to say) prefers the method of the hooter.

Some readers remember that the Pioneers a few years ago produced a play by one of the most advanced young authors of France, de Bouhelier, entitled "The Children's Carnival." We found it bold, fantastic, touching, and excessively painful. But it was undoubtedly the work

of a lofty mind. Recently this work was publicly played in Paris, and, although all the literary world was there to pray and bid for success, a minority remained to scoff—and whistled! Not since Sardou's "Thermidor" fell—as they call it in France—at the Comédie years ago, or since the historic row at the Théâtre Réaliste (which rightly brought the director of that undesirable institution to the police court) has there been such a commotion. Bouhelier is one of the young gods; he almost ranks with Claudel in sacrosanct appreciation. To whistle at his work was no longer a mere theatrical incident, but a question of grave import. As one of the critics put it: "Unfortunately, one does not flout the bad pieces, but the bold qualities of the good ones." And that is not fair. Nor is it a good defence to say that, since applause is admitted (and coveted), since both are noises, applause is an incentive, derision is a discouragement and an injustice. Think of it: the author has, perhaps, devoted months to the creation of his work; the actors have rehearsed for weeks; the manager, departing from a policy of money-making, has ventured a fling for the sake of dramatic progress; anxiety, earnestness, hope, reign supreme; the majority of the spectators are receptive, expectant, perhaps ready to be indulgent if the achievement belies the effort; but a minority have come with prejudice. The author is a new man, a bold man. This, in other countries, says the French critic, would entitle him to consideration, but—and who knows whether the malcontents are not a band of disgruntled and unacted playwrights?—it is sufficient here to proclaim, "Off with his head!" Nor is the theme of the play to their liking, since it deals with the suffering of children, and, in a country where the average is "only two," the cult of the child is far greater than elsewhere. "Suffering children"—the very idea is revolting! You can let it pass in melodrama, for there it

is not real, and is sure in the end to lead to remorse and requital; but in fantasy or in realistic plays it is repellent.

So "The Children's Carnival" was "whistled." It is not a thing to be proud of; it is not only bad manners, it is a nefarious policy. It should be forbidden, for it hampers the progress of art. It discourages author, player, and manager alike. If disappointment must be expressed in some form, let it be passive. In America a failure is the doom of silence. Not a hand—not a sound—the people file out in a procession of gloom and sombreness. It is what we call an interment of the first class. It is dignified, it is solemn, it is impressive. No vociferous manifestation could be so eloquent. Let us be mutes, but let us preserve our manners and remain humane even if we are displeased.

So far the French critic, and what he says is well worth considering. Once or twice lately there have been first nights with "incidents." They make, perhaps, capital copy, but they are very painful to all the public except the few who are spoiling for a little extra excitement. Nor does one ever know, in these days, whether uproar is an outburst of spontaneous feeling or a concerted action provoked by ring-leaders with a grievance or out for a little extra sport. Generally, our audiences are the most lenient and the most long-suffering in the world. During the war and a long time after not a "boo" was ever heard in our theatres. The public heard the cry, "The theatre wants support," and said, "We will give it." The geese had as good a time as the swans. This led to laxity. Applause and ovation became both cheap and overdone to the degree of meaninglessness. How often have we not read of a triumphant first night, and, a few days later, the withdrawal of the new piece after, say five performances! On the other hand, there have been mixed receptions, which may well have filled the actors and managers with doubt or despair, and, in spite

of all, a long roll of performances. There is something radically wrong in the first-night atmosphere—it is out of joint, as this year's winter and spring seasons have been. Nor would boo or whistle set it right. But I confess to a certain leaning towards the American method—a little less exuberance when it is a hit, and the restraint of silence when the game is lost.

XXI

June 3rd, 1923.

MORE ABOUT THE STAGE AS A CAREER

Some letters have come to hand, not only from England, but from abroad, where, apparently, our *Illustrated London News* is widely and—what I like even more—carefully read, about that vexed question of the stage as a career, to which I referred the other day. An angry "Society Girl" chides me for democratic views (whatever that may mean), and asks me why the stage-door should be closed to a drawing-room girl, and why a prospective employer should be allowed the indiscreet question anent the seeking of a career "of necessity." An "Alarmed Mother" reads something between the lines, which no one ever asserted: she wants to know whether her daughter of seventeen can in safety go alone to the theatre, and whether on the stage the same "well-ordered conditions of life" exist as in the middle class; in other words, whether there is not too much freedom for a girl who only just begins to peep into life, and whether that freedom is not dangerous. A third party, whom I will label "The Girl at the Turnstile"—for I am glad to say that all my correspondents give their real names and addresses, and that I merely adopt the sobriquets for reasons of tact—complains that she has been five years on the stage (and mostly off), has laboured in the provinces at salaries varying from £3 to £4 10*s*., has played big parts on tour in London successes, but has never had the faintest chance of a London engagement, as she, half-foreign (her father was a naturalised Russian), is a stranger in the Great

City, and has not been able to secure even an introduction to a London manager. In her periods of "resting" she has done some dressmaking—at which she is an expert, as an ex-student of an Académie de Couture in France—and has earned more than on the stage. Her heart is, of course, with the latter; and now she wants to know whether she should give up all hope of theatrical success and stick to the needle.

"Brunette," an actress well known on the London boards, who played the leading part for two hundred nights in a West End theatre of the first class, relates her experience with a manager. She had an introduction from a famous man of letters, and went to the managerial sanctum with great expectations. "Come in!" said a commanding voice, and she entered. The day was dim, and an electric light was hanging over the huge roll-top desk behind which the great man was sitting, busily writing. He never looked up when saying "How do you do?" He never asked her to sit down; she stood, and the pause seemed long to her. She felt like a servant from a registry-office. At length he took the letter which she had placed on the ledge of the desk, glanced at it, got up, and said: "Just come nearer the light, please," which she did. He then looked at her intently and concluded the interview in one sentence: "You are dark" (in fact, she was not, she was *blond cendré*), I want them fair; sorry, good morning." Before she had realised what it all meant, she found herself outside, the elegance of his language still ringing in her ear. Not a word had he asked about her career, or about her "line" of acting; he had merely sampled her hair, as a tobacco-importer samples a bunch of the fragrant leaf at the exchange on sale days.

This story of "Brunette" reminds me of another managerial interview of which an actress told me. Quite a contrast, yet equally futile. She saw a theatrical magnate

renowned for his urbanity. "He was so polite," said she, "that, after ten minutes' talk, I descended the stairs as happy as if I had an engagement in my pocket. As a matter of fact, all I took away with me was the cold comfort that now and ever in the dim and distant future there would be nothing doing." But, oh! for the balm of polite words. It makes one think of the irony of Spanish parlance, when a creditor, in the body of a "to-account-rendered" letter, with much circumlocution, threatens proceedings and winds up with: "I am your humble servant who kisses your hands," or sometimes, "who lies at your feet." Our obedient servants of the Treasury are nowhere in comparison.

And so I could go on with extracts from my letter-bag, and tales of woe and grim humour. Incidentally, let me say that I have answered every correspondent in private, and advised to the best of my ability. But what struck me, in reading all these arguments and experiences, is the sublime ignorance of people, off the stage as well as on, of the inner constitution of the English theatre, and of the peculiar mentality of our people with regard to it. I could not conceive a stage-struck French Society girl talking about the "closed door," once she had made up her mind to force it; even less could I picture a French girl wavering between the stage and dressmaking. She would make her own dresses right enough, at any rate—as many French girls do—but she would rather sacrifice herself than her ambition; for with her the stage is in the blood, and no power on earth could counteract it. Here, with our coolness of commonsense, the material side would become, if not uppermost, of great weight. The real artistic temperament would never dream of weighing "acting and dressmaking." The two ideas are as far apart as this world from the next.

Again, is it not astonishing that an "Alarmed Mother,"

in these after-war days, when the emancipation of women and their development of view have made in a few years a stride of centuries, should still concern herself about freedom and its bearing on a course of life? Is it not astounding that beyond a doubt, particularly in the country, countless people still think of stage-life as fraught with laxity of morals or worse, of the theatre as a sink of perdition? Ay, even in London there is still a survival of such antiquated bigotry. Not long ago I heard a stump orator denouncing the theatre and all its works. And the sexless women in a semicircle around him, listening to the sanctimonious nonsense which he uttered, chanted with sigh and sob, "Hear, hear!" Yet these same people who wallow in doubt and fear of denunciation send their girls to the factory, the shop, or the city without even the faintest thought of the perils of freedom.

It is time that all this cant about the stage should cease; but it is also expedient that somebody in authority should scatter broadcast some greater knowledge as to the meaning of a stage career—its aspects, prospects, and drawbacks. It is a subject that should be related in the great public schools, from those in the County Council to the colleges and finishing schools for girls.

I am quite ready to admit that those who believe in *vocation* will fight their way despite all that may be said against joining an overcrowded profession. But these form the minority; the rest still look upon the theatre as foreign artists still look upon England—countless disappointments can prove it—as a land of milk and honey and gold. To enlighten them, before the bitter disenchantment of reality rudely teaches them wisdom, is an urgent necessity.

For the theatre as a career is still only a small oasis in an endless Sahara.

XXII

June 30th, 1923.

AMONG THE PEOPLE

" Old chap," said the wiseacre, as he clapped his hand on my shoulder, as people do when they want to convince you that you are a " darned fool " ; " old chap, my advice to you is *Punch's*—you know, ' Don't ! ' " For I had told him of the call of the East, and that, under the flag of the People's Theatre, I would give them Masefield, Shaw, Ibsen, Zola. His face was a study. It twitched at every name, and when I wound up with Zola he looked like a mute at a funeral. It is my way to let people have their say, so I listened to a long prophecy of woe—as complete as the old Irishwoman in the Edgware Road might have served it up for half-a-crown from the leaves in my teacup.

He spoke of cracking nuts and peeling oranges; he spoke of babies in arms and urchins on knees interrupting in and out of season; he foreshadowed the echoes of kisses and smacking lips during love scenes; he augured that Ibsen with his long tirades would provoke " Time," and Shaw's Socialistic ideas, protest. He knew, he said, that in the dress circle the noise of the bar during the show would lead to turmoil and interference; he drew a picture of macabre hue of what would happen if certain lines in the plays were to tickle the sense of humour of the audience. Then the audience would lend a hand in the dialogue, and probably unsettle the poor actors who did their best. Finally he warned me that at the end there would be derision—

the "bird," as they call it picturesquely—and in all likelihood the Saturday night would be a carnival of uproar.

Thus croaked this raven, and when I reminded him of the triumphs of Moscovitch, the wonderful ovations I had witnessed, the exemplary behaviour of the audience—after a small preliminary skirmish, it is true, for the motley crowd of foreigners requires a little time to settle down in comfort—he pooh-poohed my defence: "Your people are not in the same street as Moscovitch—his plays were in Yiddish." It was useless to say that it would make no difference, that I meant to appeal to all the vast East End, and that probably the Yiddish population would form the smallest contingent of my public.

However, I admit that when the curtain rose upon the first of the plays, Masefield's "Witch," I hid under a serene countenance a rather fluttering heart. But somehow my fears were soon allayed. After a little shuffling and noise with seats on the part of late-comers—punctuality is not a criterion "down east"—a gentle hush glided over the audience, and within five minutes, watch in hand, from the beginning it was so deadly quiet in the full house that the proverbial pin would have fallen with audible intensity. At the end of the first act there was not only clapping galore, but bravos mingled with hands, and I felt that at any rate one point was proved—the East is accessible to dramas of atmosphere, character, reflection, discourse. Its brain is open, receptive, alert, keen. It is of different texture, I would say, from that in the West, where, on a first night, ready-made enthusiasm, camaraderie, snobbery, and the *obbligato* of the invited guests render enthusiasm all too often a habit instead of an outburst by intuition.

Only once during that long evening of a poignant, sombre play did the *vox populi* make itself heard—and that was merely during a moment when, in the ardent love scene,

beautifully played by Ernest Milton and Phyllis Relph, the long kiss of the lovers provoked an echo aloft. But the next moment the wag had to pay for his prowess: "Hush!" and "Shut up!" made short work of him, and a "Turn him out!" sounded a warning to all future offenders. Of course, the artists carried on undisturbed, and at the end of the act their greeting seemed doubled in force, for in the theatre the current of enthusiasm is invariably charged whenever in the course of the play something occurs which from the audience's point of view is unfair or uncalled for.

So "The Witch" went to the skies, and "You Never Can Tell" was listened to with such joyful laughter as would gladden the author as well as the players. They have a sense of humour in the East, and value a good thing when they hear it.

But the crucial test was "Ghosts." So far the plays produced in English at Whitechapel were charged with strong, obvious plots, and here all was, as it were, shrouded in philosophical contemplation—in argument, into which the action does not burst until the end of the long first act. But again not a whisper, not a sound, not the dread laugh at the wrong moment (as when Manders compliments Regina on her physical development). I heard nothing but the well-regulated breathing of an engrossed audience, I saw nothing but a mass of people listening intently with bulging eyes, some with open mouths, many leaning forward holding the back of the seat in front of them as one clasps balusters for support. Yet there were babies in the audience, resting on their mothers' laps; there were little boys and girls wedged in between papa and mama, the wily parents having taken advantage of the railway principle that children under five are free of charge. Heaven knows what went on in the cerebral chamber of these kiddies! I only saw their

gloating little eyes and—I heard nothing. Wonderful is the magnetism of the theatre!

During the third act I stood all the time at the back of the dress circle in a throng of spectators, and to me it was a miracle how the people could enjoy themselves, for the stage seemed a mile off and the actors dwarfed in form. But their voices carried, and their words spellbound the hearers. All of a sudden next to me a man began to mutter, anon to whistle, very *sotto voce:* he had just been at the bar, and no doubt enjoyed the traditional "couple." Personally, I would not have minded—he was merely meandering without malice. Not so two rotund Jewish matrons next to me. At first they said, "'Sssh!" Next they cast murderous glances at him; and, as he made a movement of contemptuous indifference, they each seized him by an arm and told him in language mellow and adorned that they meant to enjoy the play, and that if he didn't he could go to "another place"—which he did, and silence reigned supreme. Then the curtain descended, and applause endless and thunderous, shouts frenetic and prolonged, rent the air and seemed to overwhelm Ernest Milton, the Oswald, and his mother, who had to come out again and again and yet once more, a dozen times, until the man at the switchboard counted the units and turned the lights low. It is thus that the people of the East received the great drama of the world, and in the record radiates the promise of the Future.

XXIII

July 6th, 1923.

HERBERT TRENCH AND HIS WORK

What a strange world it is—whether it be the world at large or of the theatre! How unique is its appreciation of values! How much it often makes of those that are little and how little of those that have merit! When a comedian or a *soubrette* who has achieved a certain measure of popularity dies, the sad event is talked about, the papers are full of reminiscences and anecdotes in the wake of plaints and regrets. But when a man dies who has done work of real moment, but who in his retirement has shunned the glamour of "public incandescence," he passes out of sight with an appreciative obituary in the *Times* and a few scant lines in the other papers for his reward.

Herbert Trench died a few days ago, and splendidly was his record chronicled in the *Times;* but that was all. Not a word in the theatrical world; not an exclamation among the many folk connected with the stage, directly or indirectly—"Have you heard Trench is dead?" He had been out of sight, spending his last days in his beloved Italy, and he was forgotten even before he died. Yet Trench, not so very long ago, was a mighty figure in Theatreland and in literature. He was director of the Haymarket Theatre, and he used the large means put at his command for the pursuit of his ideals—Shakespeare, Maeterlinck, his fellow poets, and the young British drama, frequently and proudly represented by Rudolf Besier. Those were memorable evenings, when "Don" was produced, when Norman

McKinnel essayed "King Lear"—above all when, with the aid of Joseph Coudourier de Chassaigne, "The Blue Bird," in Alexander Teixeira de Mattos's idyllic translation, made all London twitter with the wonders of word and show. But real art is a costly luxury in England: after a year or two Trench found that his policy, like Shakespeare productions in former days, would spell ruin; so he retired from management, to devote himself thenceforth to his lyre, and to be productive, instead of a producer in the theatrical sense of the word. It is not my province here to estimate the poet, whose beautiful English was of classic stateliness, but I would say a word of the dramatist, who left us one *magnum opus*, and would have given us more but for the scant encouragement he received from his former colleagues. It was thanks to the Stage Society that his "Napoleon" saw the light, and in my opinion it was, of all Napoleon dramas in prose, the most exalted, the most real in portrayal, I have read or seen in any language, French not excepted. In style and build it was of the same pattern as Drinkwater's "Abraham Lincoln." Had Trench been as fortunate as Drinkwater, had he come at the right moment, when a sickened world clamoured for a man's heroism; had it been played at a regular theatre instead of in semi-public society—it would have marked an epoch, for it was as noble, it was as great, as it was bold. There was one scene—Napoleon, with maps and generals, planning a campaign—that alone would have been the making of the play in a public theatre. Yet, somehow, it was not in London that "Napoleon" brought the author the fame that he deserved. Not until the Continent had spotted the work in book-form dawned the coming of an international career. From Germany came requests for it, from France, from Italy, from Spain. In Holland, Verkade accepted it for the Royal Theatre and was ready to put it into rehearsal, when a

sudden vote of the City Council changed the directorship. Something similar happened in Antwerp, but under different circumstances: the Germans had occupied the Flemish theatre and ousted native plays for Teutonic ones. The war, too, marred the production of "Napoleon" in Germany and other countries. London managers, interested for a moment when the acceptances from abroad had poured in, held aloof; they never saw what a wonderful stimulant this play would have been in the despondent days of the first struggle. The author retired into his shell, a much-disappointed man; the play went on the shelf, there to lie until one day an enterprising spirit will raise it from darkness to sunshine, and make us feel how lofty a mind we have lost in Herbert Trench.

XXIV

July 14th, 1923.

CHILDREN AND THE DRAMA

It has been my privilege to be a guest of the Corporation of Harrogate and the energetic Director of the Baths and Wells, Mr. F. J. C. Broome, and I have experienced the joy of beautiful air, the joy of the table, the joy of the bath, which in one half-hour takes ten years off one's shoulders. I have had the joy of meeting pleasant people; but, above all, I have had the joy of hearing all that is great, good and beautiful in music, under the baton of Howard Carr, our well-known young composer, who is rapidly turning Harrogate into a Musical Mecca. Nor is it his least merit that in the construction of his programmes he allows a prominent place to the works of English composers, and thereby makes us realise the great treasure trove we have if we would but try to explore it. Strictly speaking, these concerts are not in my department, but if for once I digress, it is because I have witnessed a spectacle at the Royal Hall so stimulating, so intensely interesting, and, in a sense, so novel, that I cannot describe it otherwise than as dramatic.

Harrogate is, as we know, full of boarding-schools for children, and it is for these schools that Howard Carr has created an innovation. Every fortnight during the season, except when the schools are on holiday, there is at the Royal Hall a programme for children, executed by the band and commented upon by Howard Carr. The music chosen is frequently all English, from Purcell to Elgar and German. Remarkable spectacle! As the clock strikes five, the children

troop in, some of them wearing the uniform of a school. Some come with their mothers, sisters, and aunts; some independently—the little girls mostly with composure and *savoir faire;* the little boys flock-like, rather self-conscious. The Hall is then divided into two parts; the stalls are allotted to the girls, the dress-circle and the upper-circle mainly to the boys. What a sight—these eager faces, this bloom of youth, coming fathers and mothers of England!

As soon as Howard Carr ascends his pedestal, absolute silence reigns; and, curious to behold, when he begins his explanations, the little boys sit tight at attention, and the little girls begin to fumble in their pockets and satchels and draw from them little note-books for critical observations; for you must know that Mr. Carr invites correspondence from his young hearers, and offers a prize for an essay on their comments upon what they have observed. His method is of the simplest. He begins to explain what every string instrument means, how it is attuned; and then the leader of the particular instrument plays a little gamut in illustration. He tells them how the wind instruments come into play, and here and there, in his quiet way, he interleaves his technical remarks with a humorous observation, a little story, which sets the children roaring with laughter. They literally eat it, as the common parlance goes, and the little girls with their note-books scribble, scribble, scribble as fast as they can, as if they would harvest the golden words that fall from the conductor's lips.

And now comes the real feast—short works by great composers, living and dead; and on the day when I enjoyed this rare feast of art and education, all the numbers were devoted to our home-grown masters: Purcell, Quilter, Elgar, Sullivan, O'Neil, Cowen, German—a real galaxy, wonderful in its variety, rousing the enthusiasm of the children to the pitch of ecstasy. To see those faces now

spellbound, now gleaming with joy ; to see those hundreds and hundreds of little hands clapping at the word of the native composers ; to hear the shouting—what a wonderful manifestation of an awakening mind and imagination !

What does it portend for the future, and why do I tell you all this ? First, of course, because I should like to see these concerts established all over England ; but as a man of the theatre, there is an undercurrent in my thought. Why cannot we have in London theatrical performances for children, in order that they should become acquainted with the treasures of literature as well as of music ? Oh, I know full well that on Wednesdays and Saturdays parents and children flock to the Old Vic ; but that is not enough, and only in one quarter. If I were Sir Alfred Butt—an M.P. as well as a theatrical manager and one who knows the people—I would, at given intervals, throw open the portals of Drury Lane ; I would appeal to the young generation among the actors to lend their services—say, once a month—for scenes from Shakespeare, from Sheridan, from Shaw and all the moderns ; and I would send to the Critics' Circle a round robin, asking the members to volunteer their services in turn to come and explain to the children the nature of drama and theatre in the same simple, pleasant, informing way that Mr. Howard Carr does at Harrogate. I feel sure that the vogue would be enormous ; I feel sure that thousands of little minds would rejoice at this new vista ; that thousands of little pens would scribble on paper the vivid impressions produced on their young minds. It is done in other cities ; it can be done in London, and I wonder that it has never been mooted before.

XXV

July 21st, 1923.

THE DIPLOMA OF DRAMATIC ART

The French Academician Eugène Brieux made his name at Antoine's Théâtre Libre with his firstling, "Blanchette." It was produced, years ago, at our Independent Theatre, and I now recommend it most warmly to Mr. Kenneth Barnes, the Administrator of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, for a revival at the Academy's private theatre, as an object-lesson. For "Blanchette" was, and ever remains, an indictment of the piece of paper with the lofty name that means so little—The Diploma.

And the Diploma Terror is upon us!

The London University has established it, with an Advisory Committee to help matters, who, if well advised, would have said "Don't" before matters had gone any further. For here are the two-fold qualifications for the Diploma, as extracted from the "Regulations," a fourteen-page pamphlet that should be offered to every stage-struck aspirant as a deterrent from joining an overstocked profession :—

First of all, candidates must take a two-year course in a training school or institution in the use and management of the voice, phonetics, diction, movement (including the Art of the Dance) and acting. In the next place they must pass a University examination in English Poetics, the History of the Drama, a modern foreign language, and one of the following subjects : History of Theatrical Art, Appreciation of Music, or Physics as applied to Stage-Craft. There

will be a third-year course, suitable for teachers, and including Phonetics, Voice Training, Elementary Anatomy, Physiology, and Psychology as applied to Movement, Voice, and Speech, Teaching under Supervision, Speech Training and Remedial Work, and Stage Direction.

This is a mere skeleton of the scheme, which is so full of ramifications, subsidiary headings, and other bewildering details that no normal brain can take them all in at one vigil. Also there is not only a tax on the intellectual force of a student who is foolhardy enough to submit to the ordeal of examination; his resources too are subjected to levies from five guineas to two guineas in various sections. This I believe to be a humane way of the 'Varsity of discouraging the moth to court the candle; but it is the only touch in the pamphlet approaching ordinary human understanding. The spirit of the thing is revealed in the Examination Syllabuses, of which I quote one or two articles to prove that what will be demanded of the aspirants and aspirant teachers is beyond human strength.

I have shorn the articles of the commentary exigencies which intensify the difficult task instead of lightening it :—

(*a*) The General Principles of English Poetics, with a special study of selected poems (a three hours' paper).

(*b*) General Outlines of History of the Drama, Shakespeare and selected plays (fresh paper, three hours); anon: Study of Special Plays, mainly with reference to literary history, technique, characterisation (three hours).

(*c*) French, with special study of selected plays.

(*d*) History of Theatrical Art, *with special reference to social life, manners, customs, costumes* (my italics) (three hours).

(*e*) Elements of the Appreciation of Music.

(*f*) Elements of Physics as applied to Stage-Craft.

(*g*) Phonetics.

(*h*) Theory and Practice of Voice Training.

(*i*) Elementary Anatomy and Physiology, as applied to movement, voice and speech.

(*j*) Elementary Psychology, applied as above.

What a gigantic mass of learning, the whole gamut of which is to be crammed into one aspirant teacher's skull in two or three years! Would the originator of the scheme dare to predict his own passing? Would any of the Advisory Committee, actors, teachers, critics, stand the test? And, if the examination were successful, would it prove (1) that the diploma makes a real actor, (2) a real teacher? For if actors and teachers can to a certain extent be moulded, neither the one nor the other will in practice rise beyond mediocrity if they are born without inspiration, emotional power, communicative magnetism. A certain amount of learning is an excellent thing, but art demands more than that—something which neither examinations nor diploma can give, something that wells up from within and can be developed, but never created from without.

A thousand times better than this official hallowing on dogmatic principles would be for the 'Varsity to lend one of its halls for theatrical performances, appoint a capable producer, and a small committee to aid him to sift the applicants and to distribute parts; give performances for the people, and once or twice a year invite those who made their mark in public to test-performances where *vox populi* would by vote allot an award of merit.

Diplomas are valuable pieces of paper to be framed for the delectation of home circles and in later years for memories of personal pride. In practice they are worth nothing, as only the other day a well-known man of the theatre remarked: "It is astounding how many people walk about with certificates of merit and prizes who never get a job."

It is the same everywhere. France is full of unemployed "*prix et accessits*"; every academy on the Continent churns out "talented actors"—on paper!—but only a few of them succeed in getting on the stage, and still fewer, having reached this goal, redeem their academic promises. By all means let us encourage academies for training, and a fair layer of technical and literary education is of great help—when the real gift is there; but the history of the stage teaches one indisputable object-lesson. Great actors rarely spring from academies—in fact, as two decades pass through my memory, I cannot recall a single instance of world-stirring greatness that was academy-bred, for Sarah Bernhardt ran away from the Conservatoire at sixteen! The practice of the real thing is the wind that fans the nascent spark into flame, and I for one would select the raw talent endowed with brain, voice, personality, in preference to all the Diploma actors in the world.

Read Brieux's "Blanchette," ye sponsors of the Diploma for Dramatic Art! You may discover the one or two swallows that do not make summer, but you will never nurture real actors and fruitful teachers from two or three years' hard labour and ponderous syllabuses. Nature's dower and the invaluable school of experience make actors as well as teachers. Hence a young dramatic student would benefit ten times more from the hints of an "old stager" than from all the pontifications of the most learned (and diploma-ed) professors on earth.

XXVI

July 28th, 1923.

MATERIAL FOR THE DRAMATIC PLAYWRIGHT

The other day I had a long conversation with one of our younger playwrights about many things in the World of the Theatre, and one in particular. I will quote his own words as far as my memory allows. "You say that I am not prolific enough, and that my plays are well written, but that I use my dialogue to disguise the poverty of my story. You suspect, I surmise, that, having a fluent pen, I don't bother my head about inventing plots; that I simply jot down pleasant colloquy because I am fairly sure of my public and know how to entertain them. I see you are half-way inclined to endorse the soft self-impeachment —but you shouldn't! Mine is the case of Hubert Henry Davies, about whom you told me a tale years ago. Do you remember it?"

A little pause. "Ah, yes," I said. "That meeting on the Embankment a few weeks before his sad death."

"Exactly. You asked him why he had written no play since, I think, 'Outcast'; and he replied, 'Because I have no story to tell. All round me is drab' (it was war-time); 'there is no inspiration; imagination is at a standstill. A new world will be born anon: I have nothing to say at present.' That is my case, more or less. The new world is still in embryo; the war shadow is still behind us—at any rate, in its aftermath. You do not expect me to write Ruhr dramas, or plays of national degeneration like William Scholz's, or plays of national calamity like Capek's,

or plays of incipient lunacy like George Kaiser! "Look around you; what has been produced in England latterly that really matters? Galsworthy's 'Loyalties' and C. K. Munro's 'Rumour'—and the latter is so good, so powerful, and (managerial excuse) so long, that nobody dares to give it a chance in a regular theatre."

"Essentially, if not numerically, you are right," I said. "And, what is more, the same symptoms are to be observed in other countries besides Germany and Slovakia, already mentioned. In France there is stagnation, and the one new name that has come to the fore with hope of greater things than the skilful but artificial 'Aimer,' is Paul Géraldy's. In Belgium, Herman Teirlinck's 'Protracted Film'—why will not even the Stage Society give it us?—is a play of the moment. In Holland even Heyermans has been silent for some time; and when recently he was here as the guest of the Pen Club he was rather pessimistic as to the future. He did not exactly use the words, but he conveyed to me the idea that there was no stimulant from without to generate new thought, let alone enthusiasm——"

"I could go on diagnosing, but in the main we are in accord," interrupted the author; "so why blame me?"

"There is no question of blame. I only ask myself: Does the average playwright go the right way to find the fountain-head of inspiration? If life around us is lacking in interest, is there not a treasure-trove into which scarcely one of our dramatists ever dips—I mean history——"

"Great Scott! History—dust and ashes, and the gigantic figure of Shakespeare forbidding in the background!"

"I know, I know; the thought is a bogey, but if you had only let me finish, and not fallen into my little malicious

trap, you would think otherwise. Let me explain: As I am not so young as you are, and every day discover how infinitely much there remains for me to learn, I have become very careful in the choice of my books. For aught I know, my life may be short, so I discard novels—which generally teach me nothing—unless they have a very distinct bearing on the life and thought of to-day. I need not enlarge; you know what I mean. Well, in order to enrich my storehouse, to feel the pulse of real life, to kindle my imagination by the *choses vécues* which time after time confirm that truth is stranger than fiction, I read biographies of men and women who have played big parts in the world, or their memoirs when, in the service of the State, they have witnessed the unfolding of the history of recent times. I repeat 'recent'; and since you will ask for example, I will only cull three from the bunch: Philip Guedalla's book on Napoleon III. and his Second Empire; the Life of the Empress Eugénie in her latter days at Farnborough; last, but not least—and I am in the thick of it and deeply impressed—Sir George Buchanan's (our late Ambassador at Petrograd) 'My Mission to Russia.'

"Man alive! What romance, what plots, what dramas, every chapter of which would spur the born dramatist to action! And yet, in all my years of dramatic criticism in England, only one playwright has dared to bring near history on the stage. Louis N. Parker's 'Disraeli,' which made George Arliss's name in America, and found in Dennis Eadie a good second by *tour de force* and intelligence, is, so far as I know, the one theme lifted bodily from the pages of modern history.

"And now, to whet your appetite, not to weary you with long tales, think of it! From Guedalla's book: the fatal crisis when war with Germany was decided, and Lebœuf assured the Emperor that every strap and button

was in order; the departure of Napoleon for the field; the Regency of the Empress, surrounded by self-seekers and incompetency; Sedan! From the life of the Empress: the flight from Paris (thanks to the American dentist, Dr. Evans); the terrible journey to England; the exile at Chislehurst, with a perfect Court in miniature, as if there were still Empire and Government; the death of the Emperor and the Prince Imperial; the widowhood, with still a Court life and an inner life full of memories now and then revealed to her confidants. Lastly, from Buchanan's vivid volumes: how he, in the name of Britain, tried to save Tsar and Russia; how he, in defiance of etiquette and protocol, revealed to his Imperial Majesty of All the Russias the interior state of turmoil of the realm, and addressed him in such terms of directness and criticism as would have meant 'Siberia' had he not been under the protection of the British Lion and steeled by his honesty of purpose, so that the Tsar listened, bowed to his homily, and, with a handshake, indicated that he would profit by the warning. Needless to go on: to point to the abdication in a railway carriage under the pressure of Soviet envoys; to the dreary days of Tsarskoe; to the confinement in Tobolsk; to the catastrophe in the cellar of Ekaterinborg —a tragedy withal that vies with the Trojan Women and Hippolytus. And to think that this is but one grain from the diamond mine—that at Mudie's and the *Times* libraries there are shelves groaning under the weight of tomes nearly every one of which is as full of drama as the egg is full of meat!" I stopped short.

The young dramatist simply said, "Thank you. Let's stroll down New Oxford Street; I want to pay a call."

Perhaps, after reading this little record of a club chat, he will not be the only one going in that direction. For there dwells Mudie and his treasure trove.

XXVII

August 4th, 1923.

NOVELIST AND DRAMATIST—A BRITISH FILM-PRODUCER

Once again the old controversy has arisen in the criticisms of Mr. George Moore's comedy, "The Coming of Gabrielle." Plainly, he has been told that his play is not of the stage; that it is not dramatic; that it is too wordy; that the action is hampered by lingering on side issues; that the interest is not continuous; that the characters are "bookish"; that his methods are not wholly skilful; that he indulges in soliloquy—in brief, that "The Coming of Gabrielle" is a novelist's play, brilliantly written, amusing in parts, but on the whole not satisfactory.

A good deal of this is true; above all, the tribute paid to the style. It is sheer joy to listen to such dialogue—so direct, so mellifluous, so aristocratic in form and choice of words; so scintillating with wit and mockery that sizes up people and things in a sentence as swift, straight and penetrating as an arrow hitting the target. We have no English word to express its qualities; the French, in the palmy days of the Second Empire, called it *haute comédie*, which in my mind always conjured up the vision of an author penning his dialogue with a quill, not a fountain-pen, and in Court dress, frilled at shirt and flanked with an *épée*. If Mr. Moore's play had no other claim to excellence than its parlance, it should still be held up to the playwright of to-day as a model of the art of expression.

But that is not the only plea for the defence. The play

is not undramatic, at any rate, in its conception; it merely becomes so in the third act, because the author did not find, in my humble opinion, the right solution or did not express it so cogently as to convince us. What he meant to indicate, I take it, is that Gabrielle, an *amoureuse*, married the young and rather buffoonish secretary in preference to his middle-aged cousin, the distinguished novelist, because she found youth, with all it implies, more desirable than brain and maturity. But Mr. Moore, so outspoken in other parts of the play, was not clear in his finale. We find Gabrielle in the arms of the novelist as well as on the knees of the husband she married so farcically and illegally in Austria. Now, our sympathies were naturally with the distinguished author, perfect man of the world as well as perfect lover; and, as Gabrielle was not a stupid girl in her 'teens, but an Austrian countess who knew the world and all its ways, it was natural that we expected her to marry the novelist, with whom she had fallen in love through her admiration of his books. Moreover, the way was paved for this ending—not only happy, in the theatrical sense, but logical—since the marriage ceremony, performed by the priest with a visiting card for all legitimation, would have been invalid in Austria, of all countries in Europe, where birth certificates and other legal instruments are *de rigueur*. So from the audience's point of view the play—the first act of which was a masterly exposition, and the second act of which, despite its inordinate length, held us because the conflict became very interesting—ran off the rails in the third because the author rang his changes and became entangled in the meshes of his own invention. Yet I contend—and I think the producer would be on my side—that the cardinal fault lay not so much in structure as in the exuberance of dialogue. For even the third act could have been saved

if a scythe had been applied to the thicket. But it may be surmised that the plea for curtailment was in vain; the play had to be acted as it stood or not to be acted at all. And it is here that the novelist was less well advised than the practised hand of the theatre. Had Leon M. Lion been allowed freedom to weed out the superfluous, the first two acts would have carried us away as by lightning express, and in the third the author would have found, what he is told now, that the end is awry and inconclusive. Nor would it hold good to say, "I defy convention; this is my way, and in my eyes the only way." Audiences, and especially such an audience as that which filled the St. James's —the *élite* of literary and artistic "intelligentsia"—may be credited with some judgment and right appreciation, and if Mr. Moore were told that, filing out, not one of the many expressed satisfaction with the finale, it may be permissible to assume that for once *vox populi* was right and the *vox dei* of the author was wrong.

On the other hand, I entirely disagree with the critics who condemn Mr. Moore's detailed narration of events which have nothing to do directly with the action. These digressions have the licence permissible to masters: Alexandre Dumas' "speckled peach" tale in the "Demi-Monde" is unforgettable and still fascinating to-day; and when, in "Francillon," he indulges in the minute description of how a *salade russe* is to be mixed by recipe, no Frenchman raises protest; for often on the stage it does not so much matter what is relevant, as the manner in which it is expressed. And the secretary's tale in the first act, as well as the novelist's own narrative of his methods to beguile the outer world, are exquisite *jeux d'esprit* which I for one would not care to miss.

Again, it seems churlish to chide the author because he allows brief speeches in soliloquy. Soliloquy, in a way, is

old-fashioned; but our author would be right in saying that it is quite human and common in certain phases of life, when the soul is full to bursting, to utter a few words aloud, even if no one be present to listen or the reflection demand no response. When the mind is at work the lips are apt to do strange things. I remember in war-time a very full 'bus speeding along Notting Hill Gate, and a burly man suddenly pulling the bell, exclaiming in Anglo-German jargon, "Ach, Gott! da bin ich im wrong 'pus!" That was soliloquy bursting forth from an agitated soul! Would critics have taken exception to this cry of reality?

Lastly, as to the characters. Were they not life-like? I could have pointed to the foil of the novelist-hero—he was in the stalls as precious as Moore painted him. Would not the secretary have been less life-like if the actor had not elected to accentuate his comicality? Was Gabrielle herself not life-like?—and each time I mean in the realistic sense of the stage. Did she not remind those who remember history of Pauline Metternich, who swayed the Tuileries?

I wager that if this play had not borne the famous signature of George Moore we should not have heard so much of the novelist-play. Having admitted the errors of structure, the inordinate length, the all-too-copious explanations—which, indeed, are novelistic peculiarities—there remains the fact that "Gabrielle" possesses the essentials of a play that would appeal to a far wider circle than matinée audiences, if the author had allowed the Escoffier touch which, with a twist of the spoon—a little taken out, a little added—turns a fairly well-cooked dish into what ladies call "a dream."

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The other day at the private view of the new Gaumont film, "Fires of Fate," founded on Conan Doyle's story—a

wonderful vision of the land of the Pharaohs—there was a rare outburst of enthusiasm. As a rule our private viewers, let alone the trade-show patronisers, are very reserved. If they show outward approbation at all, it is at the end of the exhibition. The rest is silence. But on this occasion the vivid pictures of the desert, the oasis, the broadness of the canvases, the great outlook manifesting the master-mind of the producer, elicited sudden and well-deserved applause whilst the film was in progress. For this was a British film, and, in its breadth of conception, perhaps the finest, proudest thing yet attempted under our flag. For once we could well say as regards American competition: "We can deliver the goods when the right man is at the helm and there is no stint of resources." Had the producer been there, he would have had an ovation. When I read the name, Tom Terriss, I thought of the young actor who was the son of his famous father, William Terriss, than whom no more romantic hero the modern English stage ever produced, save Lewis Waller. Tom, who, like his sire, had been a Jack of many trades before he landed on the stage under the wings of Benson, was not such a dominating personality as William, but in time he became a capital comedian. He went right through the mill—legitimate, pantomime, East London melodrama (in the palmy days of Isaac Cohen, at the Pavilion, Whitechapel) and musical comedy. In due course tempting offers from America lured him to the other side, where he became popular and made his name in musical comedies, but more particularly as a Dickens interpreter. His romantic disposition drew him to the film, and as he graduated on the stage, so he worked his way up in the film world. He was at home in all the great producing centres of the States; he studied at the feet of the masters, such as Griffith. Anon he became a producer. The public over here knows

little of his earlier efforts, but his reputation travelled in front of him, and when once again he came home on a visit, he found the Gaumonts ready to give him *carte blanche*. Hence " Fires of Fate," which will, when released, be the talk of London, and secure for Tom Terriss a captaincy among the great producers of the hour.

XXVIII

August 11th, 1923.

A PLAY EXCHANGE—SINCERITY IN ACTING

He came to me with what he termed a "real idea."

"Is there in London," he asked—by way of leading off—"a Play Exchange?"

"An Exchange—no. We have literary agents; theatrical agents, with play-readers attached; some managers have even tried 'tasters'; and I think a few critics are now and again to be found to peruse manuscripts for nothing, in the case of playwrights none too well blessed with worldly goods, or for a fee which is necessarily pitched high in order to *dis*courage the well-endowed and well-meaning dilettante. But if you refer to a central office where one can find published and unpublished or foreign plays, the answer is absolutely in the negative."

"Exactly. So, supposing you want a French or German or Italian or Dutch play, how do your students and adapters manage?"

"Ah, that's a very intricate question. If it is a French play not well known, one goes to the Coin de France, or Le Livre Français, the new enterprise in Knightsbridge: catalogues are ferreted out; queries are sent to Paris; and with luck—I say, with luck—in a month you may be in possession of the play, if it is printed. If not, you have to apply to the agent of the Société des Auteurs, and the process takes longer and is costly, for a deposit may be required."

"Hm! And if you want a German play?"

"That is even more intricate; for remember that in Germany only few authors—mostly the best known—publish their works. The custom there is to put a play in the hands of an agent, to have it printed as a manuscript—*i. e.* for private circulation—after which it is sent out to all the principal theatres for perusal. Consequently, in nearly each case you have to find out who is the agent who acts for the author—and there are many of them in Berlin, Leipzig, Cologne, Frankfurt, and elsewhere. Of course you can apply to one of the leading agents in London, and he will find the play you want. But I take it that this is, for many reasons, not the purpose of your question. You seem to indicate that we need in London a place where we can walk in, find a well-stocked library of foreign plays, and a person who is so well informed as to the dramatic literature of Europe, and the way plays are distributed in the various centres abroad, that, without much trouble or research, you can lay your hand on the work required?"

"You have hit it. But I would go further: I would have branches in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Milan—in fact, in all countries where English plays are likely to be in demand or to become popular by propaganda, so that our plays find a greater outlet."

"Don't forget Amsterdam and Madrid," I interpolated; and he went on:

"Now, how would you set about it?" and, as if anticipating the ominous question, he said, "I think I shall have sufficient capital for a start—but how to begin?"

"Are you a linguist?" I asked.

"Yes. French, A 1: war-product. German, pretty well ditto: I have been two years on the Rhine."

"Of course you are well versed in literature, but do you know people over here who could lead you off abroad with letters of introduction? For you want a 'kick-off.' Once

you are in any of the centres named and have found access to one author or publisher of note, the rest is easy. Continentals are very helpful in that way: a week in Paris, in Berlin and Vienna, three days in smaller capitals—in six weeks you will know all the people abroad worth knowing and you will have a quiverful of material. I think your 'real idea' would be well received everywhere. London managers, too, like Basil Dean and Playfair, would welcome it. We are all alive to the fact that, under prevailing circumstances, novelties generally come to London when they are already 'old vintage' abroad. You remember the case of 'Los Intereses Creados,' of 'Le Monde où l'on s'Ennuie'?"—and we went into anecdotes about these and many other works that had been flourished before our eyes as "the latest," when to some of us they were but new lamps for old—things that we might have known long before, if our sources of information had been up to date.

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In his address to the competitors in the British Empire Shakespeare Society elocution contest, Mr. J. B. Fagan said that his award would be based on the following principles: Sincerity first; then, in order, Sense, Speed, and Voice. He did not specify Diction, but I take it that is covered by "Voice," and on this assumption I am fully in accord with his classification and the chief and foremost place allotted to "Sincerity."

Sincerity—what does it actually mean? It is a word much used in criticisms—and abused by the way of *cliché* when the critic, at a loss for a more penetrating definition, applies it to one or several actors, in a bunch, as qualified praise. Between the lines one should read—"the performance was not remarkable in any way except that it seemed natural."

In my opinion—which I am glad is in accord with that

of a producer of such experience as James B. Fagan—"sincerity," or "a sincere performance," is praise of a very high order and should therefore be sparingly given.

"Sincere," in the dictionary sense, is: "being what it appears to be," not simulated; honest—therefore somewhat mixed in meaning when applied to acting, for all acting is simulation of a kind. However, the "being what it appears to be" helps us over the dilemma. It indicates that what we see and hear (and feel) in the work of the actor is so apparently true that we accept it as reality. To achieve that, the actor must either feel what he portrays, or he must be so endowed with the gift of temporary tears—forgetful of self—that the audience believes that he feels. This point of controversy is as old as the hills, and it has never been discovered whether Sarah Bernhardt (who avowed that the feeling was sincere in her diction) or whether Coquelin (when he declared that in the midst of "Cyrano" he thought of other things and rendered the part as it were subconsciously) was right. Nor does it really matter: the theatre is a cave of illusion: how that illusion is created is no concern of the public, provided that it exists and holds. Again, there is a great difference between young actors and amateurs and artists of record and repute who have become practised by experience.

What Mr. Fagan meant by sincerity in its fullest scope is, I take it, understanding—which is the penetration of a part, the outline of it as a whole, and the value of a line in relation to it. Next it implies avoidance of all self-consciousness, mannerisms, affectations, which in some are more strongly developed than others. Lastly, and most important, it demands that an actor should forget that he is acting, forget his audience, forget that he is interpreting somebody else's feelings and words. He may be nervous—and that is often a quality of magnetising force—but he

should be sure of his words to the degree of their being seemingly his own; he should be sure of effect—comic and dramatic—so sure that it would, as it were, well up and never convey the idea of being laboriously propelled to "fetch" the laugh or move the hearer. To crystallise it in a few words, the actor should feel as free and imaginative as the impromptu after-dinner speaker, in contrast to those who read their speeches and ladle out jests and peroration with mathematical precision, but without that inner vibration that rouses others. If an actor should ask me how to cultivate sincerity, I would say: Learn your part, live in it, rehearse your words as if they belonged to your own life, and, when you are before an audience, let go as if there were nobody near by—or as if you were unbosoming yourself to your closest, dearest friend. If you can do that—if you can, I repeat, forget your own ego and become another man's shadow—you will be sincere, and, to quote Mr. Fagan once more, the rest will follow "in order."

XXIX

August 18th, 1923.

THE CHARM OF CHARLES HAWTREY

A LITTLE anecdote which I may now relate throws a peculiar and pleasant light on the wonderful character of the great artist so suddenly wrenched from our midst.

It was on the train between Paris and Calais; we had met accidentally, and, as people do in the World of the Theatre when they are good old friends, he began to "reminisce" and to kill time with stories gay and grave about all sorts and conditions of people. We naturally came to Hawtrey tales, and, as the opportunity was favourable, I ventured to ask him whether the story of "the shirt" was true.

"Which one?" he said, with that smile, half-'cute, half-bashful, which formed one of his greatest charms; "there are so many."

And I told him. "It was in your young days, of storm and stress. You owed money to a well-known man about town, and he had laid embargo on your goods—in other words, the brokers were in your flat, and you were on bad terms with your creditor. One Sunday early, when you were week-ending in Paris, you received a pressing invitation to a banquet in London. Helter-skelter you packed your things, with the intention to return to Paris the next morning. In the 9 a.m. train you found, to your dismay, that you had forgotten your dress-shirt. It was Sunday; what were you to do?—where was a shirt to be got for love or money previous to the banquet at 7.30? Then you had an inspiration. Never mind the quarrel with your creditor!

You cabbed to his house; you urged an interview, and you said: 'I know, S., that you don't like me just now, but I must attend a banquet in an hour; for heaven's sake give me an order for a shirt!' The humour of the situation struck the hard-headed S., and on a chit he ordered the brokers to let bearer have a shirt. That evening 'C. H.,' as spick and span as ever, was, punctually, in full war paint, at the Cecil."

When I had finished, Hawtrey laughed heartily. "Yes, it is quite true, and there is a rider to the story. Old S. was so pleased with my diplomacy that next day he 'phoned me to lunch, and promptly released all my goods and chattels. We remained good friends till he died. Poor chap! He was a tough 'un in his business, but he had a heart."

"May I put the story in my Memoirs?" I asked—for at that time I was beginning to collect things I had enjoyed and endured during my career as a critic.

"Certainly—but don't mention old S.: he might not like it, *wherever he may be!*" I underline the last words, for he uttered them in that inimitable way which was all his own—a little satire, a little hesitation, and a fund of human humour.

The little anecdote itself turns a light of many hues on the character of the man. There was a Bohemian; there was the man of the world, the man of action, the man of resource who knew of no obstacles, the man who grappled with every situation with a wink of humour. And so it was on the stage as well as off. I remember him at the dress-rehearsal of Anstey's famous "Man from Blankley's." It was one of those dreadful rehearsals when all was sixes and sevens; when everybody was "fluffy"—including "C. H."—it was a habit of his on the first nights. His hesitation added to his charm. The great dinner scene (a classic of sitters and bourgeois humour) seemed flat. Everyone

connected with the show appeared figuratively to pull his or her hair; the thing would not work; even the manager—that safest of steersmen of the theatre—was full of doubt, was nervous; while Hawtrey himself ran hither and thither like Richard clamouring for a horse. I was that evening the one impartial onlooker in the house, for the rehearsal was strictly private, and as I had to leave next day for a holiday my presence was tolerated by special favour.

Now I enjoyed myself hugely. I foresaw an immense success: the cast was capital; Hawtrey himself immense, in spite of gaps and lapses of memory. When it was over—very late—he came up to me. "Well?" That is all he said, with the double smile of diffidence and quizzicality. "You are going to make one of the hits of your career," and I burst forth in whys and wherefores to prove my case. "Bless you—let's spin a coin," and he flung a half-crown up in the air: "Heads!" At that moment his face was a study. I cannot describe it otherwise than comic agony. Down came the half-dollar. It was heads. "Let's look at the date: '1887. Jubilee'! It will be a winner. Damn the dress-rehearsal! Good-night." And a winner it was.

On another occasion he had written a play—all by himself. It was called "Mr. Martin," if I remember rightly, and played at the Comedy. It was very witty and a regular Hawtrey part. The first night went well, but criticism was not favourable. "They call it an actor's play," he complained laughingly, "just because I know the tricks of the trade. I might have foreseen that. Whenever we actors write plays you chaps sit on one. I'll bet that if I had called my play "Mr. Hawtrey," by Charles Martin, the notices would have been quite different. Next time I am going to fool you all." And he did. He wrote another play. He said that it had been a success and had excellent "notices";

but he would never confess where it was played, or disclose its title. "I will carry my secret to the grave—or to my Memoirs."

The dear fellow! Perhaps he has done both, for a few days before his death he was correcting the proofs of a volume that will add to the perennial memory of his name. The world at large knew Hawtrey only as a great actor; an institution; a prince of good company; a Bohemian of the palmy days when Bohemia was a realm full of the joy of living; a man of the world in the perfect sense of the word; a charmer to women and a popular figure wherever men congregate in chumminess and conviviality. But what the world will never know is the kindness of his right hand unknown to his left. He has been a maker of many careers, and, even when his own life was beset with cares (as it often was in the past), he could not say No to any petitioner—especially when it was a woman—who came to him in distress. For whenever one talked to him of his phenomenal and lasting success on the stage, of his popularity among men, he would say: "Yes, yes, dear boy; men are all very well, but it is the women, God bless them! that make us. And don't let us forget it."

XXX

August 25th, 1923.

AUDIATUR : ET ALTERA PARS—A LIFE-DRAMA

With some difficulty I groped my way through the darkness of the hall. It was not what we call pitch-dark, for footlights, half-way turned up, and a little chandelier flickering in a corner created a kind of doubtful dimness. It was like entering a mausoleum—before a funeral. In the stalls a few cleaners, polishing brass and sweeping the débris of last night's performance—a basketful of dust, ashes and a motley crowd of chocolate and cigarette wrappers—shed a little life in the funereal stillness. For the four grave men in the centre row sat stock-still, blowing away clouds of cigarette smoke, and tightly holding their sheets of paper—the list of the victims ready to ascend the scaffold. For this was an audition, and in the hands of the four grave men trembled the balance of fate of seventeen anxious hearts—seventeen artists of more or less renown, or, as yet, none at all, summoned to show their worth and best, and to be weighed and valued as to their chances in the evening bill.

It is done every day in London, for it is the approved way of finding the material that compiles the programmes. But oh! the kind cruelty of it. You are bidden for eleven a.m., but for aught you know, and fear, you may have to wait for hours before the stage manager beckons you to "turn on." When you come on in all the glory of war-paint, with nerves all a-tremble, with the braggadocio of despair, the stage is flooded in light, but beyond yawns a vastness, as if in a mist, and all the anxious eye discerns is

the tribunal of the four grave men, indicated by the sign-posts of the white sheets in their hands and the will-o'-the-wisp of their flickering cigarettes. If the "turn" is song or dance, a pianist is called upon to create the illusion of an orchestra. If it is a conjuring turn, your "patter," so carefully prepared, and studded with jokes designed to catch a laugh, is your sheet-anchor. But no one will laugh —the four grave men are sterner than the Judges on our Bench. If it is a turn of acrobats—they that live by blare of wind instruments, drum, and that breathlessness of the audience which reins in applause like an impatient steed—your own "bravos," "houp-làs," egging-on cries have to supply the enthusiasm that kindles the muscles.

On that day, the list was so long that the judges had to apply short shrift. And their gladiatorial way to show thumbs up or down was expressed in the two words: "Thank you!" The performer could hardly perceive the inner meaning of the utterance. When people are nervous, all sounds seem ghastly and fraught with ill omen. But the careful observer, unseen, soon learned the inflection of that "Thank you." Sometimes it fell dry and hard—in acknowledgment of mediocrity ("Nothing doing"); sometimes it cut the performer's final bow razor-like (condemnation—"Away!"); sometimes it was a gentle drawl ("Your case is being considered"); sometimes it was "Thank *you*" (a small engagement looming in the distance); sometimes—only once that day—"*Thank* you," with unction on the "*thank*," as if to say—"At last a winner—a star!" But the poor victims knew none of these subtleties; they came, they shook like aspen leaves, some voices seemed to strand in the throat, some of the dancers halted for a second as if touched by a stroke, but all of them went valiantly on to the end, and then vanished—for evermore; or, if among the elect, to reappear anon in the full glare of the footlights.

But nothing by word or deed indicated their fate. They packed up their things, they went away in the tremor of uncertainty; they could not foretell, nor even guess, the meaning of that "Thank you." A letter would tell—or vain waiting for the post.

I frankly admit that I sat there as woe-begone and as nervous as most of the aspirants, and that I came away in sadness. It affected me as much, this trial of artists, as a murder case at the Old Bailey. For here, too, was the jury, and the Judge, in his "Thank you," carried a black cap as well as an acquittal. How many of these seekers of fame may have returned home with "death in their soul." The system may be equitable, but it is wrong. No artist can be at his best in close scrutiny, in darkness, in a charnel-house, soundless, and without a breath of atmosphere (and encouragement).

I do not urge that we should repeat the experiment of years ago, when the late Mr. Charles Morton—I believe it was he—threw open the doors of the Surrey Theatre to the clamouring music-hall profession, with a "Let 'em all come," for five minutes each. That was a terrible afternoon of four hours. A sad procession of all the lame and the halting, of all the old brigade that strove to be young, of all the relics and the remnants of bygone ages. It was as painful as the exodus of the Lourdes train at the P.L.M. station in Paris. But at least there was life in the theatre, there was the desire to encourage, to lend a hand; and the experiment was not wholly barren. Six of the bunch jubilantly came away with promise of contracts in their pockets.

If I were a leader of a music-hall, I would follow the good example of the cinema, and invite an interested crowd—there are thousands of people with time on their hands—to enliven these auditions, to make them worth living for.

The applause, the enthusiasm—or the aloofness—of these hearers would be of great help to the judges. In the *vox populi* they would discover the chances of the performer in the regular bill. It is a simple affair, and costs but cards and postage, but the profession will bless it as a remedy to the dead-and-alive ordeal of the present *audiatur*—by the judges only—but also of the *altera pars* by a jury of all sorts and conditions of men who are the mainstay of the Variety World.

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Some thirty years ago there was a young playwright in France who quietly achieved some successes at the smaller theatres without setting the Seine on fire. His work was pleasant, domesticated comedy, just the thing to amuse the good *bourgeois* for an evening. His name was Jules de Glouvet, and, as it had none of the flavour of a pseudonym, nobody seemed to care much about the identity of the author, who was sometimes heard, but never seen.

He might have gone on writing in this aloofness from the limelight, had he not had the good luck—some afterwards called it bad luck!—of having a play accepted at the Odéon, the second State Theatre of France. It was called "La Perdrix," and what they call over there a *four authentique*—"a dead frost"—and it scarcely outlived the three regulation performances which, according to the State Charter, must be given of any play accepted. Such casualties are rare at the State-aided theatres, and the failure set pens in motion. Who was Jules de Glouvet? Where was he to be found? Did he really exist? asked a cartoonist over the picture of a partridge sitting on a "dud" egg. It was in the Dreyfus days, when all France was seething with anger and controversy, when the country was divided into hostile camps, the Dreyfussards and the anti-Dreyfussards, the latter in overwhelming majority, and so

aggressive that for a time the *Figaro*, upholding Dreyfus's case, was banished from all "so-called respectable houses." As a French châtelaine said to my late mother, who was her guest, when she saw *Figaro* arriving by post: "Please, *chère amie*, do not allow this poisonous sheet to infect my house!"

Now, among the fierce opponents of Dreyfus, the Crown Prosecutor was the fiercest. A powerful advocate, he had already made his name by asking for, and obtaining, the head of Eyraud, the sad hero of the Gouffé trunk murder; of Ravachol, the bomb-thrower; and other criminals, against whom his case for the prosecution was only equalled in deadliness by the *mort sans phrase* of Philippe Egalité.

The name of this redoubtable advocate was Quesnay de Beaurepaire, and, whenever in doubt as to the issue of a case, the authorities confided the prosecution to him. His was the power to lead juries, and even judges, so he was the right man to stamp out, if possible, the Dreyfus brood, and relentless was he in his pursuit as Public Prosecutor. But, unfortunately for him, the Dreyfus Press, ever on the alert to buttress their still somewhat feeble cause, made a discovery. They found that Jules de Glouvet, the unfortunate author of the dead "Perdrix," was no other than Quesnay de Beaurepaire. That roused an Indian war-dance in the camp. The dreaded Prosecutor a "fallen" playwright; what fun! what sport! what a game! They knew that in France nothing kills like ridicule, so the poets and the lampooners, the satirists and the cartoonists, joined hands to make fun of the redoubtable dualist, and they succeeded so well that everywhere, except in official quarters, Quesnay de Beaurepaire became the laughing-stock, and his "Perdrix" a sacred bird of the Dreyfussards. After that, one heard no more of Jules de Glouvet, and when, at length, the light of truth began to dawn on the martyrdom of Dreyfus, the

powerful Prosecutor, at variance with the other judges, who were awakened to justice, retired, still convinced of the guilt of his quarry.

He lived in oblivion to the age of eighty-nine, and died a few days ago in an almshouse. Dreyfus is still alive, and the Legion of Honour glitters on his breast.

XXXI

September 1st, 1923.

FRIENDSHIP AND CRITICISM

It cropped up like this. Three critics, one of music, the others of the drama, were the guests of a provincial city, to judge an event of importance—a new opera by a local composer and a literary man, well known in town. Some stars had been engaged to appear, and the critics and the criticised stayed harmoniously, if apart, in the same hotel. The day after the performance, at the pleasant hour betwixt tea and dinner, the trio foregathered in the lounge. The work was done; judgment had been delivered; "copy" despatched to London. They were discussing their verdicts, and in the course of conversation one of the dramatic critics let fall: "I am glad that I could praise the work of my friend the librettist, and I told him so this afternoon on the links." "Your friend!" said the musical critic; "do you mean to say that you cultivate the friendship of people whom you are called upon to criticise? That is exactly what I avoid; here I am, the musical critic of one of the leading papers, and I can honestly say that I hardly know any of our composers, and even fewer of the artists. I live a little out of London, and when I have written my criticisms I hurry home, and I stay there if duties do not call me to town. I don't go to banquets, receptions, suppers, because I look upon them as waste of time, and because I do not want to be introduced, if I can help it, to my future victims."

"And you think," said Dramatic Critic No. 1, "that that makes you fire—I should rather say—favour proof? But what about the few you do know? Don't you think that, willy-nilly, you might feel a tender spot for them—tenderer than for those you don't know? After all, we are but human, and, however just we may be when holding the scales, it is obvious that we might let them lean a little in the direction of our sympathies. I frankly plead guilty to 'unconscious leniency.' I cannot define it—but it is there, and not only with me. Now, I am one of the few who read their colleagues; although in our fraternity, which is singularly bereft of *esprit de corps*, it is an accepted pose to affect complete ignorance of our mutual work, except in the case of one or two, who, by their paper, even more than their name, stand out in prominence. And what do I find? Whenever, to my knowledge, the critic knows the author or the interpreter—as we first-nighters can check by observing exchange of greetings—there is a kind of veneer in censure and 'lay-it-on-thick' in praise. We may chaff, we may chide, but there is in the judgment an absence of the acerbity (or austerity, if you prefer the nobler word) which falls to the lot of the unknown quantity. And, by the way, I, in contrast to our musical friend, make it a point to know as many authors and actors as I can; it leads to penetration—to better understanding. I side with Théophile Gautier when he said that an hour's talk with an artist was worth ten with his work."

Dramatic Critic No. 2 chimed in with an anecdote and an experience. The anecdote was in defence of the critic's methods of to-day as compared with the past. A famous musical critic of the Victorian Era wrote once to a great singer of his time with whom he was on friendly terms, that the snuff-box which the tenor had sent him was rather nice,

but a very paltry present (or something to that effect). There lies a world between the lines. The "experience" sheds the right light on the position of the critic, said No. 2, narrating: "One evening, years ago, discussing justice with the then Chief Magistrate, after a dinner-party, I said: 'You are a good friend to me, Sir—now, what would happen if I came before you some morning at Bow Street "drunk and disorderly"?' And he replied: 'Having regard to your social position it would be my privilege to give you a month without the option of a fine. On the Bench I know neither friend nor foe, although in some cases, when I learn of the culprit's hitherto blameless record, I may exercise the prerogative of mercy.'"

I agree with the Musical Critic that it might be better not to come in close contact with our "victims"; but unless we wish to lead the life of a recluse, or be dubbed a high-brow pedant, it is sheer impossibility as London social life is constituted. (And did not even our musical Aristides know a few composers and singers?) Again, I agree with Critic No. 1 that personal acquaintance leads to better valuation of any artist; and I, for one, see no harm in accentuating the praise bestowed on an artist whom I know not merely by his work, but by his artistic conscience, provided I have the courage to be as direct in censure, when my judgment dictates it, as to the stranger. A French critic, who criticised his *chère amie*, is the man for me. What we critics have to avoid is being influenced by the blandishments of flattery on the part of wily actors and pretty actresses—or by the unpleasant experience of coolness when we meet artists with whom we have found fault. These are individual and temperamental questions. But one thing is certain, you cannot solve them by aloofness. For, as Clement Scott used to say, the critic's lot is full of surprises,

pleasant and unpleasant; sometimes when I come home I find a letter of abuse and sometimes a basket of blush-roses. We should not be affected by either. But I am a strong believer in the Chief Magistrate's one month and the prerogative of mercy—according to circumstances—that is the question.

XXXII

September 15th, 1923

THE OLD GUARD AND LETTY LIND

The old Gaiety Guard is rapidly waning. And each time that a leader departs it would seem that we suffer a personal loss. Some will explain it with the cold comfort that we were young when the old Gaiety radiated in its heydays, and that the brilliant reflection of the past is rather a mirage than a reality. It is a habit of age to lament with a sigh: "Ah! how different things were in my youth!"—while the younger generation sets up its own gods in worship and will in due course repeat the same plaint. But, for all that, it remains true that the great *comédiennes* of burlesque and operette, as well as the famous actor-managers of the time headed by Irving and Tree, were not only popular idols of a period, but have become a kind of imperishable tradition which fills a momentous chapter in the history of our stage. Theirs was the unique gift of individuality, which, coupled with that other indefinable dower, personality, dominates all sorts of men and women—or, as we used to say, the masses as well as the classes. I will not go so far as to say that among the musical-comedy actors of to-day there are not some equally favoured and equally fêted; but, particularly on the fair side of the artists, there is a lack of outstanding talent as well as a sameness of type. Unless one takes a special interest in musical plays one hardly remembers the features and the names of many leading ladies. Even a librettist with whom I discussed the subject the other day, when he

was in quest of a heroine and could not find her, admitted that Miss So-and-so and Miss X, both very charming actresses and singers in their way, conveyed nothing to him but a blurred picture of agreeable blondeness and a well-trimmed figure. "If I saw them in the street," he said, "I would not know who was who; they are stereotypes, not types of marked idiosyncrasies. Hence the vogue of José Collins: in her Oriental splendour, she is a peak in a chain of hillocks."

That was not so between the 'eighties and the twentieth century. What is now the exception was then the rule. I could reel off a long list of names, beginning with Kate Vaughan and not ending with Letty Lind, who died the other day, every one of which meant a "somebody," detached, individual, commanding. Nor was it perfection of art or distinction of refinement which made their popularity. Some were capital singers and indifferent players; some capital actors and poor singers; some exquisite dancers and no more than that; and when they united all the talents their sway over the public was so great that their names became household words, their photographs adorning the mantelpiece of every correct young man of the world and even the boudoirs of all sorts and conditions of girls—a living picture in the minds of people who generally took but slender interest in the world of the theatre.

Take Letty Lind, with whom we all fell in love in her Gaiety and Geisha days. Sculpturally and lineally she was not exactly beautiful. Her voice was small and husky; her dancing, exquisitely graceful, was of archaic simplicity; and as an actress she was more attractive by her somewhat bashful *naïveté* than by technical *savoir-faire*. Yet the moment she appeared there was spell! It was as if an elf had strayed from an enchanted island and found herself

bewildered among everyday mortals. That husky little voice of hers cosied us like a lullaby; her dancing charmed us as the flutter of a butterfly; her acting, just a little *gauche* and halting, and ever illuminated by a smile of sweet yet arch innocence, made us say inwardly—"What a dear! so *petite*, so frail, so constantly reminiscent of the ivy clinging to the oak." Who would ever forget her in "Carmen Up-to-Date," "Ruy Blas," "Monte Cristo Junior"? Once she had a song about a parrot, and in mimicry, with flapping arms and limbs perched stark, she created the make-believe of the bird in various moods. For aught I know it was a silly song, but Letty Lind's gentle art made it the song of the season. It was cock-a-doodled in the street and in the country—not to have heard Letty sing it was to be out of the running. The play in which it appeared is long since forgotten; the song, too, was unrecalled except when the name of Letty Lind cropped up—as it often did, in spite of her years of retirement—and then it was a case of "Do you remember her in the Cock-a-doodle?"

Hers was eminently the gift of individuality combined with personality referred to. She was unique. Time after time young artists have tried to follow, to imitate, to replace her, but the copy ever conjured up the indescribable and unapproachable fascination of the original. How often, when seeing a musical play of later years, have we not said: "A Letty Lind part"? And we would see in her lissomeness, her grace, her witchery, how she would have done it in her day. But the parts we may have, the player cannot be replaced. There was but one Letty Lind, and she had left us a memory for all heritage.

XXXIII

September 22nd, 1923.

ENTENTE CORDIALE: ABOUT ENGLISH ACTING

Once a year my Continental friend comes to London to see all there is to be seen in the World of our Theatre. He is not exactly a dramatic critic now, although formerly he was a much-considered judge at home. But journalism abroad leads to all kinds of high places, as they made him literary adviser to the National Theatre—some said to muzzle his very outspoken criticism of that institution. As Alphonse Karr said: "Pour faire un député faites-en un ministre."

He takes his business seriously. You will find him in Paris, in Vienna, in Rome, in Scandinavia; it costs him more than three times his honorarium, but, like myself, he is an enthusiast, and wants to know everything everywhere. At home in his study you find piles of books—Shaw as well as Archer—and a bookseller in St. Martin's Lane has a standing order to send him any play that is published; needless to say, the same orders are lodged in the other capitals! (How the man ever sleeps, heaven only knows!) And you have but to mention a title, when he leaps at you like a leopard, and in torrential eloquence pours out characteristics and criticism of the work.

Now when in London we do the round in September, when the *premières* are as bountiful as a bunch of grapes, and each year he summarises for my benefit his observations of progress. For he is an admirer of our theatre, and—it sounds comforting when we hear so much croaking—he

thinks that we are not sufficiently appreciative of our playwrights. He thinks that the younger generation has something to say, and slily he always adds: "You must not forget that your dramatists have merely liberty, while in Paris, Vienna and Berlin (oh, Berlin!) they have licence. You have your bedroom scenes, and secretly I believe your people revel in them; but your four-posters are always discreetly curtained—do you get me?" What he finds strange is that it is so difficult for young authors to get a hearing in London, and that a mediocre foreign play has much greater chance of acceptance than our home-spun. "But the English people love the label, eh? You remember the story of the Café de la Paix when the honest *maître d'hôtel* said to the English guest, a *bon client* who asked for a bottle of champagne of a well-known brand. 'I don't remember that vintage; we have a wonderful pre-war wine at half-price.' 'Show me the bottle, please.' And when it came, the guest said; 'But it has no label; take it away.' A Paris hall-mark is preferred to 'made in England.' When Géraldy wrote 'Aimer'—clever, but laboured, and entirely unsuited to England—there was a great demand for the rights. Why? Because Paris liked it. But now that somebody has got it, who will play it? No one, except perhaps a Sunday Theatre."

I did not quite agree with that line of argument, although I had to admit that two great London successes would have never seen the light but for the pluck of "irregular" theatrical enterprise. The one is "At Mrs. Beam's"—discovered and produced by Mr. Norman McDermott at his Everyman Theatre with such success that it was taken up by Mr. Dennis Eadie, and is still filling the Royalty. The other is McEvoy's delectable "The Likes of Her," which Miss Lena Ashwell's "Once a Week Players," unbeknown to London Theatreland, performed

in outlying quarters and attracted the attention of Mr. Basil Dean. My friend waxed enthusiastic over the bill at the St. Martin's—that wonderful cameo play of Barrie's, "The Will," which I was glad to elicit, at a recent banquet, mightily pleased City magnates and captains of industry but rarely interested in plays—and over McEvoy's comedy of the East End, so simple, so true, so warm of blood, and with its painful yet moving scenes of the young street-girl's awakening to womanhood. It is one of the most drastic psychological studies ever ventured on the stage. "The homœpathic cure of a soul," as my friend puts it.

When we came to the acting and production, he was again full of praise. We agreed that Basil Dean had been most astute in his selection of Mr. Esmé Percy as his producing aide-de-camp. "The Likes of Her" is like a canvas of Jan Steen or Mieris anglicised and brought up to date. It is real, and a rare blend of low life, spontaneous humour, and human sentiment. As for the acting, we both said—and we meant it, and for once my colleague did not chide me for my being such an out-and-out pleader for English acting—that nowhere in Europe could a better ensemble be found. A pity that such a group could not be held together for a permanent company. I would here like to give all the actors in the two plays their due, but that would be trite reading of a long list of adjectives of praise. But I cannot resist naming four of the chief players—Leslie Banks, Mary Clare, Hermione Baddeley, and Ben Field. Mary Clare has made great strides since her first real manifestation of talent in "The Skin Game." She is an actress of rich emotion and admirable restraint. Miss Baddeley, the new-comer, is an *ingénue* so sincere, so wholly unaffected, so tender of pathos, yet so well endowed with humour, that great things may be expected of her. Of the girlish

actresses, she and Elizabeth Arkell are the most convincing. As for Ben Field, he is typical of the East End—a little world in one character; one thinks of Dickens in a modern key. Last but not least, Leslie Banks. What a fine character actor! How deeply thought out is his work! How minute and well observed his every detail! His personality is dominant (remember the Robot!) but not obtrusive. There is some indefinable power in him that arrests and makes for sympathy beyond a rugged surface.

From the St. Martin's we went to the St. James's, and saw Arliss and Isobel Elsom in "The Green Goddess." Again we were struck: George Arliss is all we were told of him. He fringes on greatness. There would be no exaggeration in comparing him to the elder Guitry. The same firmness of grip, the same finesse in all directions. As for Isobel Elsom, fairest type of English beauty with a soul, she portrays emotion without betraying the effort. Thence to "Ambush"—another perfect cast. And the round went on until in a single week we had seen ten plays, and only one in which the acting would impel but faint praise. And that was not entirely the actors' fault. The play was French, not too pleasant, and wholly foreign to the English temperament. "English respectability masquerading as French immorality," said my friend. It was rather apt. Rarely, very rarely, do our actors succeed in maintaining in a French play a semblance of make-believe ("Bluebeard's Eighth Wife" is an exception). You cannot successfully turn a Saxon into a Latin. There is an insurmountable difference of blood-heat and vivacity. Think of some English plays as seen in Paris! Our actors may seem dull Parisians, but how do French actors strike us when trying to impersonate English Society? "I should smile," as the Yankee says!

No; we, the foreigner and I, the well-seasoned London

playgoer, agreed that we may well be proud of our actors to-day. We may not have much greatness—that is another story quite apart—we may want strengthening on the women's side, and that is merely a question of search: the material is there; if you cannot find it in London, scour the provinces, and it will lead to rare discoveries. But the rank and file are splendid. Our stage is nearly entirely free of "cabotinage." We demand of our actors nowadays that they should not only impersonate, but penetrate, their parts, and it is no idle boast to assert that, on the whole, their work proves that they strive to accomplish both.

XXXIV

October 6th, 1923.

RENASCENCE OF THE MUSICAL PLAY

When "Lilac Time" came, and Schubert's sweet music slowly but surely drew all London and the stranger within its gates to the Lyric Theatre, there was some division in the artistic camp. The conservatives on the musical side were up in arms, and angrily spoke of sacrilege: how dared one lay hands on the work of a great master and debase it to the score of an operette libretto? And then there followed much argument as to whether it was permissible to commingle modern tunes with the immortal melodies of the master-singer. Perhaps there was something in the latter reproach, although there is at least one song in the "additional" score so finely conceived and orchestrated that even musicians admitted that it was "if not pure Schubert, the next thing to it."

The liberals—those who were devotees of the old operette and looked upon modern musical comedy as facile jingles, and even upon Lehar and his acolytes as something of very minor value—the liberals jubilated. This was a step in the right direction. This was uplifting. This would attract and lead the crowd to greater appreciation of good music. It was absurd to talk of spoliation—if so, what then of the annexation of Liszt, Tschaikowsky, even Wagner, to the horrors of jazz and the saxophone? Here at least, in "Lilac Time," there was charming romance allied to the melodies—a sweet and quaint story of happy Germany of the past, when the poets and the singers were the idols of

the people, not the swordsmen; when folk were simple, and from their simple hearts let the joy of living burst forth.

And the liberals for once were right. "Lilac Time" spread out like a fruitful vine, and now, on its first anniversary, it has established itself in the favour of the public with the virility of a coming-of-age. I heard a well-known writer say at the Gaiety after "Catherine's" triumph: "Whenever I feel moody or numb-skulled, in need of solace, I spend an hour at the Lyric and come out with spring in my heart."

Now in the World of the Theatre, as in all the other little worlds around us, one rich harvest begets greater sowings. So it was a foregone conclusion that, after Schubert, other composers of the past would be scanned as to their possibilities for operatic purposes. Strangely, although we have so many shrewd people in the theatre-world, and the success of "Lilac Time" should have kindled their wits, the idea never occurred to an English manager. "Lilac Time" was "invented" in Vienna, and "Catherine" —which may be Austrian or German, I am uncertain as I write—is an importation, although the very entertaining English book might well be the original work of Reginald Arkell and Fred de Grésac, instead of a "version."

This time the originators abroad, with an audacity the very thought of which makes me tremble, laid their hands on Tschaikowsky—of all great composers in the world. Schubert—well, let it pass; he was a lovable soul; he would have forgiven, perhaps smiled at it. But Tschaikowsky!—that Jupiter, that name not only beloved but revered and uttered in the awe of humility—Tschaikowsky fingered, dissected, hanged, drawn and quartered for the sake of a libretto—and that in musical Germany and Austria! Would it not mean outcry and revolt? Would it pass

muster on the first night and survive?—for your musical enthusiast on the Continent is not mild-mannered when his idols are threatened—and, who knows? even in London the devotees of the Promenade Concerts might have been in the field with brimstone and hell-fire.

Yet nothing occurred; a success abroad, "Catherine" has come to us in triumph unprecedented even in the perfervid atmosphere of a Gaiety first night. True, there was José Collins, whom the crowd worships and who can do no wrong. True, there was Michaelis as Menshikoff, who sings from his heart as well as with his chords; true, there was Bertram Wallis, as fine a personality as the Great Peter himself may have been after his simple life on the wharf of Zaandam.

But Tschaikowsky!—pressed into love-duets, into comic duets between the evergreen Amy Augarde and Billie Leonard, excruciatingly funny as a secret-service man masquerading as a polar bear as real as if he had been lent by the "Zoo"! Tschaikowsky in exquisite Russian ballet, outstripping the Diaghileff troupe in agility and magnificence of grouping—that was right; but again I think and shudder! Tschaikowsky chained to the comic, slangy rhymes of the librettists—his melodies, with their streak of rugged undercurrent, dulcified to love-ballads of English sentiment—would that pass unchallenged? Would that evoke no protest? Would the sense of the sublime and the ridiculous not come protestingly into play?

Yet in the temper of the public there was not a single dissonant. From the introduction to the finale—a fragment of "1812" with the National Hymn of Russia interwoven—the house, in all its quarters expectant and in festive mood, gave free rein to its enthusiasm, that grew to ecstasy, almost paroxysm.

Never-ending was the applause, never-ending the voci-

feration, the greed for encores. In her charming address to the audience, after much persuasion, Miss José Collins found but one word for everything, everybody : " Wonderful." Yes, it was wonderful. And why ? Because there was harmony instead of apprehended discordants ; because the story was, in its fairly faithful narrative of a romantic page of history, not unworthy of the music ; because, on the principle that even in Shakespeare we remain unjarred by low-comedy entirely uncalled for, good fun is no offence, but may be deemed, like kings' jesters, an acolyte to greatness ; because we revelled in all the reminiscences that kindled our imaginations and made us feel proud—it is so human !—of our memories of the music ; because we felt that here was an enterprise flattering to our intelligence, so often belittled by the offering of stupid books and a vacuous score ; because, lastly, " Catherine," as well as " Lilac Time," indicates that henceforth the musical play need not necessarily be jumble and jingles, but will establish its status between the time-honoured operette and the opera-comique. For once the divining-rod has struck water, the well with a ceaseless flow. Who is next after Schubert and Tschaikowsky ? Mendelssohn and Abbé Liszt ?

XXXV

October 13th, 1923.

STAGE AND CINEMA

A GREAT deal has been said and written lately in the comparison of stage and cinema—mainly in favour of the film, and referring to the limitations of stage-craft. The great wreck scene in "Good Luck" at Drury Lane was the main pivot of the discussion, and wide was the difference of opinion. The cinema partisans declared that, however cleverly contrived, the picture never approached reality. The stage was too cramped; the distance between shore and yacht too incredibly small; the yacht itself was puny in proportion to the people in it, who looked like giants; the motion of the sea was too regularised to be real; the manning of the lifeboat was wholly mechanical; above all, the rotation of the scenery in order to indicate the movement of craft was ludicrous. Fancy the land slipping past while the ship stood still! No wonder that people would prefer the realistic pictures of the cinema, which were made with the help of Nature; while the scenes at Drury Lane—including the race—were nothing but mechanism, with only the actors approaching the verisimilitude of life.

Of course, there is something to be said in favour of this criticism. The stage has its limitations; and even Drury Lane, however much its mechanism has been brought up to date, is not the last word in scenic art. Compared with Reinhardt's latest contrivances before the war at his circus in Berlin, our stage effects are still incomplete, being of the older school and taxing the imagination of the spectator.

In these circumstances, say the film-partisans, why not abandon these incomplete " stunts " altogether ? Why not say openly, " We cannot compete in plastic representation ; let us seek sensations which can be rendered by light and stage-craft so natural that there is no need for concessions or excuse " ?

But, on the other hand, what of the cinema ? Is " fake " not all too frequent, notably in English films ? And even in the almost perfect American productions are there not flaws to be found in perspective and proportions ? Does not to them apply the criticism levelled against Drury Lane—giant structures and masses of people in the foreground, a vision akin to crawling insects and ant-heaps in the distance ? Talk of a tax on the spectator's imagination, is it not constant in the case of the film ? Are landscapes brown, grey, or white, or real seascapes brown, white and grey with silver points ? The camera gives but one answer, the mortal eye has to do the rest—just as it has to supply colour and animation when beholding the photographs of those we know in life.

The whole matter resolves itself, apart from technical difficulties which are admitted, to one of attitude of mind. We should not go to Drury Lane in a critical mood. We know from past years what to expect : the panorama-brush at work—broad strokes in the play—broad humour—broad effects—broad acting—in fact, grand window-dressing with nothing much behind it. When I go to Drury Lane I feel that I am out for the evening. I cannot quite forget that I am a critic, but I say in the first instance that I come here to be amused, puzzled, thrilled, perhaps harrowed. I know it will all end happily, so why should I care ? I chuckle cosily in my stall, and the people on the stage and off are working for me. I am told that there will be great doings ; that Arthur Collins, that man of great resource

and imagination, has a few shocks and thrills in store for me that will make me sit up. They may not all come off—as, for instance, the motor-smash, no doubt remodelled by this time—but there is more to come. Meanwhile, the hero and heroine traverse perils and threatened perdition; the comedians scatter sallies and howling puns and jests; here and there the comic vein of the authors outruns discretion. Now comes the great sensation. I am expectant, tuned up, ready for vibration. Oh! I know it can only be make-believe; all canvas and little Britannia-boys ruling and moving the waves from beneath; it can't be as thrilling as the cinema and the copy from Nature. But it is alive; the people are people with voices—they will wail and shout; they will affect anguish and distress. Yes, it is all bunkum, but let me be, and in my childlike mood let me wonder what the stage can do; let my critical sense be dumb for a moment—*je me laisse faire*—don't disturb me. I know anon there will be reaction; the critical mood will supersdee the festive one; and for aught I know the former might impel me to find fault with what on the spur of the moment beguiled me. Still, even so I would say that I admire Arthur Collins for his effort to do wonders with his stage and for his bold competition with the cinema. He is too astute a producer not to have discovered from his stall on the first night where illusions and picture came in conflict. He will not rest until the machinery of his theatre allows the nearest thing to reality instead of concessions, gaps, and limitations. That is a question of research, technique, and money. Meanwhile, Drury Lane has nothing to fear—as yet—from its formidable rival. Life, voice, and colour are its staunch allies.

XXXVI

October 20th, 1923.

BROADCASTING IN THE THEATRE

There are always little wars in the World of the Theatre, and the conflict with " Broadcasting " is one of them. In a very lucid paper delivered to the Gallery First Nighters, Mr. Archibald Haddon has ably held the scales. He enumerates the four points of opposition by the managers, namely—

1. That unlimited broadcasting of entertainment favoured by Government assistance constitutes a new form of competition dangerous to their interests.

2. That the more attractive home life is made to theatre-goers by such means as broadcast entertainments, the less they will patronise the theatres.

3. That if plays are broadcast in their entirety from the theatres, people will stay at home to hear them in preference to seeing them at the theatres.

4. That players who are in the habit of paying numerous visits to favourite plays are likely to visit them less frequently if they can listen to the plays in their homes.

And examining every one of them, he has proved—successfully, I think—that broadcasting will be an ally of, not an antagonist to the theatre.

The protest, in a different form, is by no means a novel one. Years ago, when the late Cavaliere H. S. J. Booth, of telephone fame, began to exploit the electrophone, the direct ancestor of broadcasting, some managers were up

in arms, and a good many theatres refused to instal the sound-boards, on the plea that play and music " at home " would encourage people to stay in and discourage them from going to the theatre. Practice, however, proved exactly the contrary, particularly in the case of musical comedy. The electrophone, instead of being a competitor, became an " appetiser " : people wanted to " see what they had heard " ; so they decided to go to the theatre, which most likely they would not have done if the electrophone had not played the part of the Piper of Hamelin. In the long run, the electrophone won the day.

No doubt this will be the case if Mr. Haddon's forecast is realised, by force of reason over prejudice. For he, as the first official dramatic critic of the British Broadcasting Company, a post of novel interest and portent, sets out convincingly that the theatres allied to broadcasting have much to gain and little to lose. Every sensible person will agree that if an audition in fragment at home deters a hearer from a visit to the play, he is neither a lover of the drama nor one to be considered as a regular playgoer. Wherefore his aloofness means neither plus nor minus to the main question. We can simply assume that, broadcasting or not, he would stay at home. On the other hand, based on the electrophone experience, it is very likely that scenes and melodies heard in the armchair will kindle imagination and the desire to see the whole of the picture. And here Mr. Haddon, happily, instances how broadcasting can convey but a tithe of the charm of such productions as " The Merry Widow," " Catherine," or " The Prisoner of Zenda." For the listener-in, having read the description of beautiful spectacles, will not rest content with the mere hearing. His eyes will hunger while the ear is fed and crave for satisfaction. Besides (I quote from Mr. Haddon), look at the splendid advertisement for the theatre !

Why, it means a fortune in return for a morsel—the argument is irrefutable.

Next comes the question of policy and wisdom. It is nonsense to declare, as some short-sighted journalists did to Mr. Haddon, that broadcasting is a mere toy doomed ere long to be relegated to the nursery: We heard it about the telephone, when Philip Reiss of Mayence discovered it by his two little paper drums with a string between, and no one would believe in its possibility and importance; we heard it when Lumière at the Polytechnic showed us the wonders of the cinema; it is ever so, and, with the father of railways, Stephenson, in the end we remained sorry for the stupid "coo." For broadcasting is full of immeasurable educational possibilities, and I am again with Mr. Haddon when he says how much more we should enjoy to hear the classics *viva voce* in our chair than by reading; how fascinating it will be to hear great writers speaking their works to us; how informing to listen cosily to savants, inventors, travellers, narrating their experiences! Why, it is like discovering a new world of knowledge. But to revert to policy and wisdom. What will happen if the theatres persist in boycott—fail to see the importance and commercial value of spreading their wares over thousands of miles across land and sea? War would then be carried into the enemy's camp, and ominous would be the outcome. For the B.B.C. is a powerful, growing concern; it commands vast resources; it can command more if needed. What of their creating their own companies for the production of plays and operas? They have done it before on an experimental scale, and we have it on the authority of all concerned that the success was great. Will that not mean a most disastrous competition? For it implies that in the long run the B.B.C. will not remain content with giving performances for the one purpose only. Their very patrons will clamour

for something more concrete, and the result will be that the broadcasters will seek to perpetuate their work in ordinary theatres; they will become rivals in the fullest sense of the word; they will be in the running to snatch theatres from the market—for money will be no object—and then *vae victis*.

Mr. Haddon quotes America, on the authority of Mr. Rypinski, the father of American broadcasting, who says: "The more progressive American theatrical managers are now permitting excerpts from their productions to be broadcast, and are as a consequence experiencing quicker general recognition of the merits of these productions." And when a journalist asked Rypinski if there was any attempt on the part of the entertainment world of America to boycott broadcasting, he replied: "No; the boycott is in bad odour in America."

Oh! these long-headed Yankees. They understand that discretion is the better part of valour (and of the pay-box)! If our managers are not purblind they will follow suit. Wherefore it will be excellent policy to broadcast Mr. Haddon's capital homily.

XXXVII

October 27th, 1923.

BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE COLISEUM

I HAVE had a wonderful experience—the experience of the babe in the wood; and it taught me how true is the old saying that one half the world does not know how the other half lives. One day, enjoying an afternoon's performance at the Coliseum and beholding the changes of scenery on the revolving stage which are made in view of the audience, I thought I would like to see how it is done—what is happening on that vast stage; and promptly I hinted to the management that I was curious to have a peep behind the World of the Theatre. And equally promptly came the reply, "By all means. Come next Tuesday at 11.45. Mr. Harry Crocker, the stage manager, will be there, and Mr. Smith, the chief electrician, and they will reveal to you all the secrets of the charnel house. Then in the afternoon we will put you in a little seat on the O.P. side where the curtain is handled, and you will see the stage apparatus in gala and in function."

I came full of expectations, and when, after an hour and a half's toil full of interest, I left (in the temperature of a Turkish bath, and with a head reeling with impressions), I had to admit that, familiar with many stages of Europe as I am, I had never seen such perfection of equipment, such foresight in case of unexpected derangements, such apple-pie order and—so few men accomplishing with the aid of natural power such a variety of technical work. For at the

Coliseum twenty-one people all told, under the master hand of the great-little Crocker—the man who lives in and for his theatre—manipulate all the levers, the pulls, and the handles; the rest is—electricity.

Electricity revolves the three stages—three immense platforms that can be interlocked and detached as the occasion demands—and it can gyrate them all at the rate of twenty miles an hour. When you career on them on the stage, then you feel as on a merry-go-round at a fair; when you descend below that level—and all turns above and underneath it—it is as if you were on a bit of flotsam in a maelstrom, an uncanny feeling with a Dantesque sensation of inferno but for the watchful presence of the man at the helm, whose brake never fails, or, if it did, who has a second agent ready to stem the current.

Electricity produces and regulates all the lights. In a little cabin not unlike a railwayman's signal-box there are boards covered with countless switches to flood the stages with atmosphere. But these are now but makeshifts: an ingenious discovery had concentrated all the effects on a little clavier of five electric bell-pushes. This quintette governs all the lights in the house, on the stage, and in the basement. They are marked "amber," "red," "blue," "white," "house," and but one touch of human nature is needed to make the light and shade that is required. The magic wand of a conjuror is child's play in comparison. The same electrician controls the dial of the revolving stage. It is like the speed-indicator of a steamer—he has but to turn the hand to "speed," "slow," "stop," and the three platforms obey like the proverbial lamb.

And yet the electrician has other functions. In old times there was a call-boy to tell the artists, "Quarter of an hour,

please" (before appearance), but, as the call-boy became a little swollen-headed—spoilt by the artists, no doubt—the manager thought he would replace unreliable humanity by clockwork machinery, and he installed the dictagraph—a multitude of telephones gathered on one board and reproducing the voice in such a way that there is no need for a receiver. Every button that is pressed sends forth a message to a particular part of the house—to the porter, the flies, the front of the house, the artists' dressing-rooms; to the manager, Mr. Crocker, who thus from his office can at any time ascertain what is what everywhere in his domain. Should the apparatus fail, never mind; everything is run in double harness at the Coliseum, even the puissant light-cables in the maze of the basement. In the whole Coliseum there is no chance for the sun to set. The whole system is worked on the principle that to safeguard against emergency is the mainspring of efficiency.

And so, on a little spiral staircase of more than a hundred steps, aloft to the flies, where endless canvases, backcloths, flats, wings are spanned on ropes, and powerful winches relegate the unwanted material to the back. The sight of this upper region is inspiring: one thinks of the rigging of a fleet of sailing-ships. There are one hundred and ten sets of scenery suspended here, and every set has its own cables, and every cable is worked by two men—men who twice a day climb up a ship's ladder from the base of the stage. Their work is hard, but it has its compensations. When the programme is simple, merely rooms and parks, they have much leisure; but when there are ballets and other big productions requiring changes, they toil like Trojans, for all is regulated to the minute. Delay is a word unknown at the Coliseum. Everything is so well systematised that mistakes are almost impossible, in spite of

this huge arsenal of scenery. Every backcloth, every float, every wing has its number, and every item on the programme is marked on the time-sheet of the day. For my benefit scenes were set while the stages were revolving below, and all fitted like the proverbial glove.

By this time the luncheon hour had struck, and for a while the great house was all silence. But punctually at two-thirty I was in my little seat on the O.P. side next to the wielder of the curtain. The musical director, Mr. Alfred Dove, looked in. We had a little chat on his thousandfold occupations in his strenuous efforts to attune his orchestra to the bent of the artists, to the strange transitions from acrobats to drawing-room singers; and he grew enthusiastic over his definite policy to fill overtures and pauses with works of great masters. Then a little bell tinkled, and off went the *maestro* to the front of his army of some fifty musicians.

Meanwhile I watched the curtain, and—gruesome thought—when I saw how with one pull of a lever the mighty drapery swiftly receded, I remembered a visit to the condemned cell in one of our prisons. It was the selfsame function as the hangman's fatal switch of the death-trap. But soon the gruesome comparison vanished. In my little nook I saw the work of acrobats in wonderful precision. I watched the audience: I saw how their interest grew—how their faces glowed—how they smiled, laughed, babbled, wriggled in their seats—how, imperceptibly, hands began to move as if to be ready to applaud. And then, a tug at the lever, and with one fell swoop the curtain came down and two boys rushed to each end to close the folds. One more tug, and space again; more applause, beaming artists scraping, bowing, bowing, scraping, bounding into the wings. And so it went on for three hours, and from my

little seat I felt the pulse of the vast audience beating within me, and to a nicety I could have gauged the temperature from luke-warmth to the fever-heat of enthusiasm. Withal it was a strange and wondrous adventure, and as I came away I felt like John-o'-Dreams.

XXXVIII

November 3rd, 1923.

ACTING AND FEELING

A good many years ago Mr. William Archer collected a symposium on the question "Do actors feel?" under the title of "Masks or Faces." It was a remarkable volume, containing, as it did, an erudite study by Mr. Archer on Diderot's famous dictum, and the personal views of many actors of the day, including Sarah Bernhardt. At that period the prevailing spirit was that to feel what they conveyed was one of the exigencies of dramatic art; to admit the contrary amounted almost to a confession that one was a craftsman, not a real artist. Only the great who had "arrived" and were fearless of public opinion could permit themselves the candour of declaring that feeling was not a necessity, that to "convey" was the thing, and that often—as in the case of Coquelin—in the midst of an impassioned scene their mind travelled in foreign directions.

Coquelin in later years, when his Cyrano was the vogue of Paris, once gave a very significant answer on the subject. He was asked what passed through his mind when night after night he had to deliver Cyrano's great speech in the last act. "*Souvent je pense à autre chose*," he said, and it was only he who dared to say it. Imagine what we would have thought if a young English actor (or actress) had confessed to such aloofness! Why, he would have been a marked person, and one could imagine managers saying to him when seeking an engagement: "I have no use for you;

your head will not be in the business." This fear of candour was so intense, the actors were so afraid of being misunderstood, that I remember more than one player who, when Mr. Archer circulated his articles for an expression of opinion, declared: "I was dying to have my say, but I could not afford it—it would have made me impossible."

However, times have changed: no actor is afraid nowadays to take part in public discussion, even if his views are in flagrant opposition to those of managers and critics. He is a free agent and one credited with intellect and something akin to omniscience, to such a degree that often he is asked his opinion on subjects where angels fear to tread.

Meanwhile I may relate here a few personal reflections which bear on the subject and may be of interest to the actors and actresses whom I hereby would invite to allow me to publish their individual opinions on "acting and feeling."

In my salad days I was intimately connected with the Flemish Theatre of Antwerp. We had there a very great character-actor, Victor Driessens—had he spoken another language he would have been world-famed. He was one of those who commanded tears; his voice was moving; his personality monumental. To him the stage was his own particular preserve. He could do on it as and what he liked: it always told. His peculiarity was rarely to be word-perfect. The prompter in front of him knew this, and from his box watched him like a lynx and always managed to give him the right cue. Consequently his delivery was slow and measured; but in those days of bravura-acting and "labouring" the public savoured it. Now once, in the midst of a terrific scene of Victor Hugo's "Bellringer of Notre Dame," the prompter did not catch

the speaker's eye. And would you believe it, Driessens, in the most dramatic moment, instead of halting, flung at the prompter a furious: "Verdomme—what is the word?" caught it, went on, brought the house down! He had not had a second's anxiety, he said afterwards; all he wanted to do was to get even with the prompter!

A great Viennese actress, who was renowned for her powers as well as her eye to business, was on tour with Sardou's "Tosca." In the famous torture scene she rose to great heights. After a public ovation, her manager rushed into her room to proffer enthusiastic congratulations. But she, petulantly, stopped his effusion and said: "You mean hound, you accounted only for six boxes, whilst nine were full—I counted them during the torture-scene!" And of another foreign actor, well known for his worship of the fair sex despite his three-score and ten, the true tale goes that, lounging on the floor in the Play Scene in "Hamlet," he said to the King, at the tensest moment of the scene: "Lovely blonde—proscenium—look!"

In contrast. There was a dress-rehearsal at the Vaudeville years ago. An actress new to London displayed in a love-scene such emotional power that everybody predicted a triumph for her. "Now buck up to-morrow, dear," said the producer; "play like to-night and you will carry all before you." The actress, nervous, exhausted, falteringly promised; and on the first night she gave herself with head and heart to the part. But the effect was only moderate. In her excessive endeavour to strike home she overdid it. People said she over-acted.

A young actor had to convey his grief at the bedside of his dying mother. He played it with great emotion. Sobs were heard in the house. Afterwards an old stager said:

"Magnificent, my boy! If you go on like this you will be a big actor one day." A few days afterwards the young actor, who adored his mother, received a wire announcing her death. He was overcome with sorrow, took a day's leave for the funeral, and returned with a full heart to the theatre. That evening he played the scene, as he believed, as realistically as life itself; for he felt every word; he saw on the stage his own mother lying in her shroud. But somehow the effect missed fire, and the old stager, who did not know that the mother had died, said to him: "Poor chap! Applause and my praise have already produced the swollen head. You played like a pig to-night. Take care, or you will become a *cabotin!*"

One more experience. Some years ago I organised a matinée for an actress who possessed great emotional powers. The play was very dramatic, and the actress was so deeply impressed with the part that even at rehearsal she shed tears. We expected great things. Then came "der Tag," and on that occasion her eyes played like a fountain; she was what old-fashioned novelists would have called "dissolved in tears." The result was negative. So copious was the torrent that it worried the audience and in some aroused their sense of humour. The overwhelming sincerity of her emotions seemed exaggerated, and killed the projection.

The projection—that seems to be the crux of the question. We cannot gauge what the actor feels; what matters is what the actor causes us to feel by his conveyance. Life itself teaches us this. Suppose we are angered and let our mouth storm forth, our countenance, contracted in grimace, picture the upheaval within us. Ten to one our wrath will stultify the weak-minded but never confound the strong. On the other hand, if by restraint, suppression,

indication rather than emphasis, the turmoil within is manifested, it is likely to make a deep impression. One could quote such examples in every sphere where the emotions come into play. We can only approach truth on the stage; when it attempts to be the whole truth it is apt to become distorted; for the stage is not merely a mirror, it is a magnifying-glass. The old Roman saying, *ars est celare artem*, applies still to all the arts. That which is real is as near to the obvious as the sublime to the ridiculous. Of course, the actor must feel what he portrays and what he says, but to attune the emotions within him to the conception of the public—that is the supreme gift of the artist. And it is to him—and to her—I appeal for a word in season.

XXXIX

November 24th, 1923.

THE PROFESSION REPLIES

Matheson Lang on Acting and Feeling

Distinguished actors have favoured me with their views on my recent essay, "Acting and Feeling." As the response is both numerous and voluminous, the letters will, by the Editor's leave, be acknowledged and published week by week. While thanking one and all for having joined in the discussion, I now call upon Mr. Matheson Lang.

November 9th, 1923.

"My dear Grein,

"To my mind there is no doubt. Acting depends upon *feeling*, controlled by the mind. The rest—manner, voice, deportment, projection—these are the *means* by which the mentality of the player is conveyed, and the *mind* and the *feeling* work together. But that does not mean that the mind of the actor cannot travel to other things in moments of intense emotion. The instances you cite in your interesting article are absolutely understandable to an actor. In real life, does one not think of the most irrelevant things at vital moments? Have you never, in some serious moment of your life, found your thoughts straying to some apparently trivial and unimportant detail?—as a woman might stop to powder her nose in the middle of some soul-devastating scene between herself and her husband, in which their whole future life together might be at stake. Yet who but a real artist could do such a thing on the stage without getting a wrong effect? But an actress who was *feeling* such a scene *could*—and out of

the very sincerity of her emotions—achieve a perfect result from what, in a mechanical actress, would be a ludicrous anti-climax.

"If the actor does not feel what he is saying and doing, how can he possibly convey the author's meaning properly? No amount of study or practice would enable him to learn mechanically how to reproduce the tones and gestures necessary to do so. Think of the human voice alone; it is only feeling that controls it. Take any character—'Hamlet' or 'Malvolio' or 'The Admirable Crighton,' 'Juliet' or 'Mrs. Tanqueray' or 'Mary Rose.' Could any man or woman learn mechanically how to convey all the different shades and inflections and tones by which such characters are conveyed in the spoken word? And the same with the facial expression—how could one ever convey by one's expression the proper mood except by feeling?

"But we must not confuse *feeling* with *being*. The actor can feel the part and yet keep his mind, as it were 'looking on,' controlling and guiding his emotions. I look upon actors and actresses as sensitive instruments on which the author has to play; and to achieve real acting, the actor should train himself to become such an instrument—delicate, receptive, alive to every influence—so that his brain and body are, like wireless, ready to catch every wave and current, and to reproduce it.

"That is why experience of life and suffering—and, above all, suffering—makes for good acting; and that is why the present life of actors and actresses is bad for the development of their art. They seem to be becoming more and more ordinary and self-contained; the lives they lead now are too conventional; too regulated; too like the lives of the business and social world, where feelings are hidden away beneath the mask of everyday conventional life.

"That is why, in the days of the old Bohemian actor,

we got the so-called 'great' acting, which nowadays one hears is lost.

"Yours very sincerely,
"MATHESON LANG."

ACTING AND FEELING—MORE VIEWS

Miss Meggie Albanesi writes :—

"You ask me whether or not an actor should feel his own emotions affected by the part he is portraying. It is, as you say, an old problem, and one to which it will always be impossible to give a definite answer.

"In my opinion, it is not possible sincerely to convey to the audience any emotion which one does not feel, to some extent, within oneself. The brain may suggest expressions and actions suitable to the situation, but without some real feeling surely there will be something lacking.

"At the same time, while an actor should feel his part, I think his feelings should be under his control, rather than be allowed to gain control of him. When players lose control of themselves, they lose control of their audience. The power of feeling is a gift. The actor is lucky who possesses it and who can use it with restraint and judgment, as all gifts should be used.

"These are, as clearly as I can put them, my views on this always most interesting question."

Miss Yvonne Arnaud :—

"I have read your article on 'Acting and Feeling' with *great*, *great* interest. You are quite right when you say that actors and actresses do not dare to tell the truth about their feelings when acting, in fear that the public or managers would not believe in them. But the truth *is*, that *gifted* artists can play a part and *think* of something totally different from what they are acting. I have always

been told, and read also, that Talma could play the most tragic part and make his audience gasp with horror; then, at the same moment, turn his head towards the *coulisses*, and give a capital wink! Yet the audience was overwhelmed by the intensity of his playing.

"If you feel really too much what you are acting, you fail to convey your feelings to the audience. It is an extraordinary fact, *but it is so.*

"I am afraid I am very bold in telling you all this, and I am sure many actors and actresses think differently; but, after all, it may be a matter of temperament. We *all* have three or four natures in ourselves, and it is quite possible to have two 'going' at the same time, but very few people will admit it!"

Dennis Neilson-Terry:—

"A very active ear is an essential equipment for an actor. The producer can tell him whether he moves, gesturises, and uses his eyes correctly, but the actor alone can know how, when, and why he handles his voice and what he can get out of it, and surely the voice is the very essence of acting. By handling the voice I do not mean trying for beauty of tone—that 'is' or 'is not' in an actor; I mean the ability to produce the correct emotional note at the right moment. This calls also for a quick brain and, above all, control. A pianist who continuously used the pedal would become as dull as one who never made use of it at all. An actor must feel his scene first of all, get the sound of it in his ear, and then reproduce it nightly to the best of his ability. Actually to feel night after night acute emotional suffering is a short cut to the madhouse. One should use technique and a splendid sense of mimicry, and technique is control and a knowledge of what you are doing all the time.

"I think it is great fun to let yourself go and plunge into a whirlwind of hysterical bravura, but it isn't great acting. Anyone with a large voice, plenty of self-pity, and a glorious lack of what is ridiculous can do that. I believe, though, that in lyrical or poetical work—in, for instance, such a part as Oberon—it would be permissible for an actor to lose himself in the sheer splendour of the lines and let them go to the four winds; because the actor who listened to his voice in that particular kind of part would in all probability fall in love with it. But the part is not human, therefore control is not necessary, nor perhaps desirable. Hamlet, on the other hand, being an intensely analytical creature, requires a control and ear sense that few actors can give it, because of the mastery the actor requires over his emotions. Fancy 'feeling' Hamlet in its entirety eight times a week for twelve weeks!

"But really no one can dictate; everyone must play as he feels and to fit the occasion. I once served on a Grand Jury and heard an elderly woman tell a ghastly story of the seduction of her very young daughter. That woman felt the agony of every word she uttered, yet had it been played on the stage as that woman spoke in real life most of the audience would have been in fits of laughter. To me only great care, great pains, and application to the scene on hand can make a *lasting* effect."

Ivor Novello:—

"Thank you for sending me your very interesting article. I remember my mother telling me that the beautiful and gifted Lily Hanbury often deplored the fact that she could never restrain herself from shedding the second tear. 'One tear,' she said, 'and the audience will suffer with you; two tears, and the audience will suffer because of you.'

"In my humble opinion, though, the only method for the beginner, until a really marvellous technique has developed, is absolute sincerity. But, on the other hand, I quite agree that the more a mature and experienced player feels, the less he or she conveys to the audience. Oddly enough, this does not in any way apply to the screen. D. W. Griffith has repeatedly told me that he will never allow an emotional scene, or indeed any scene, to pass unless there is real, definite, vibrant sincerity.

"If the heroine's baby is dead, he works on the feelings of the heroine by a marvellous power of suggestion until she can really believe that this worst of all tragedies has happened; for, as he says, you can get away with murder with a big, warm-hearted, receptive audience, because they supply half the emotion themselves, but the cold, calculating camera, made of glass and steel, will not give to the public anything that the artist has not supplied. I cannot, of course, speak much from experience of the theatre, as on the speaking stage I am a humble, but very earnest, beginner."

Fred Wright:—

"Dear (for this time only) Friend the Enemy—

"No, I am dead against you. To say an artist can sway his audience—himself unfeeling—is like saying I, who know no music, could write Wagner's 'Nibelungen Ring.' A man may walk through his strong part, and the audience of that night, predisposed by his reputation and the strength of the play itself, may possibly miss the slovenly work . . . but let him try it on a First Night!

"You quote Coquelin 'thinking of something else.' I wonder if that was the night I saw him and was so disappointed. He gave me perfect phrasing, faultless technique, far beyond my own powers; but of fire, sincerity, truth, not one moment. I put it down to age and weari-

ness. Thousand repetitions had rendered the wheels smooth-turning, but I wondered why he failed to grip me, and why his loyal audience shared my apathy. On that night the one quality that never fails, sincerity, was not there, and, judged by his own high standard, on that night he failed. He may have counted the house, but he never gripped them!

"By the way, on my desk stands a photo of him, with, I suppose, the last words he ever wrote; a photo of himself at Pont-aux-Dames, seated on a chair in which an hour later he was found stricken unto death; and the photograph bears so flattering and kind an inscription as only a great and kind heart like his could write.

"The story goes of Ellen Terry drawing comic pictures during a poignant situation. If true, she failed that night. Of course, she may have absently drawn something during one of the pauses in the play, and even then her thoughts may have been with the actions on the stage; but that she drew caricatures on paper while drawing the people's hearts to her in tears—frankly, I don't believe it! The same holds good with an after-dinner *raconteur*. Who so dry, outwardly so drawlingly indifferent as Mark Twain?—but his listeners were convulsed. Why? Because under his casual mask his whole soul was at work directing his technique. His apparent indifference (itself high art) merely enhanced the effect.

"One of the finest actors at a dinner speech in London to-day is George Grossmith. Watch him. Under his light and easy 'touch and go,' his whole self is mobilised. No 'counting the house' methods there.

"Let any comedian start his first scene carelessly—perfunctorily; doesn't his audience let him know it? Not till he rouses himself and puts heart into his work and feels his part can he make them feel.

"Another example confirms my opinion—film work. No spoken word, no sob in the voice, only the emotions showing through the eye. Imagine Fay Compton in an emotional close-up 'thinking of something else'! Imagination boggles at it. No, friendly enemy, it may have been done and slipped by unnoticed, but I'll bet that audience felt an intangible something lacking. And the actor failed. Perhaps he didn't know it, but he did! Sincerity, sincerity, sincerity! —

"Yours from the Ranks,

"FRED WRIGHT."

Mr. O. B. Clarence :—

"In reply to your letter of the 5th, I am of opinion that no player can permit himself to be absorbed or mastered by the passion he is portraying, but these passions or emotions his training enables him to feel in a reflex or subconscious manner, while his mind is left free to employ his skill in technique. Anyone can feel an emotion, but its portrayal calls for perfection of technique born of years of experience and study. With his mind clear and alert to all the exigencies of his environment—the varying receptivities of his audiences dovetailing into the ever-changing intricacies of the players and settings—the thinking ahead, and the thousand and one niceties which mark the practised player—the *feeling is there all the time :* technique merely enables it to be properly displayed."

Miss Gertrude Lawrence :—

"In reply to your letter of the 5th, I have carefully read over the article which you sent me on 'Acting and Feeling,' and although I could write pages on the subject, I feel that all you require is a few words on my own personal feelings in the matter.

" Undoubtedly there are, and have been in the past, many actors and actresses who are able to play their parts with the utmost apparent sincerity, whilst in reality their feelings may not be in the least akin to the feelings which they are portraying on the stage. It entirely depends on the temperament and character of the individual. It is possible, as you suggest in one of the stories in your article, that if individuals of this type were really to put all the feeling into their performance that realism dictates to them, then their acting would be overdone and appear distorted to the audience. I have had to play in a great many sketches, some comic, some dramatic, some which interested me and some in which I could take very little interest. But always have I found that unless I attempted to *live* the part (be it ever so small), I was totally unable to put any sincerity into my acting. Some people are blessed (or cursed) with a more vivid imagination than others, but personally I consider that the individual who can keep his mind clear for other matters, even whilst playing a part, who can still convince his audience that he is sincere, is a very clever *actor* indeed, although I'm afraid I cannot find myself in sympathy with him.

" Personally I let my imagination run riot in my efforts actually to *live* my part, and I try my utmost not to *act*, in the literal sense of the word, but actually to be for the moment the character whom I am attempting to portray. And, believe me, this is no easy job in Revue, where one has completely to change one's entire character about ten times during a performance. I hope the time will come, one day, when I shall be allowed to maintain the same rôle from the rise to the fall of the curtain in a really good play !

" All this, however, is entirely the *personal* view for which you asked me ! "

Mr. Leon Quartermaine :—

"You hit the nail on the head when you say that 'projection,' or technique, is the crux of the question of acting and feeling; but technique has a twin sister—imagination. They are inseparable—helpless apart. Could Juliet with technique alone make her hearers shiver at the thought of—

> "'Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
> Lies festering in his shroud . . .'?

A player incapable of feeling, and of the skill to get that feeling over to the audience, will make a poor job of the work. When Coquelin confessed to be thinking of other things, he was admitting to a mechanical performance. Most of us are at times guilty of this, owing to constant repetition."

Mr. Godfrey Tearle :—

"Oh, if I could only express myself! Oh, for the divine gift of articulation! However, here goes and chance it, and you must just 'edit' as you feel inclined! One *knows* nothing: one only feels and believes, and often theories are based on personal ability (or inability!). I believe the art of the theatre is the art of *being* effective and appearing natural. I believe that one should not attempt to reproduce, but (Hamlet's mirror) reflect it. I believe *sensitiveness* is the gift which actors should possess, sensitiveness to the audience (which varies nightly). I am myself sensitive to a fluttering programme in the gallery—to the omission of an electrician to work exactly at this cue—to an unsympathetic sneer or a sympathetic sigh in front; and on these and a thousand almost imperceptible details I believe my work varies. 'Ars est celare artem'—even '*summa* ars

est celare artem.' Yes, indeed! But only the artistic onlooker knows, and it hurts sometimes to read eulogies on work which is so frankly theatrical in its worst sense. Effective to the understanding only.

" Finally, if one ' loses oneself '—to me a terrible phrase—in the name of the great god Thespis, how can one remember one's lines? Oh dear; what a mess! "

Mr. Henry Vibart: —

" I duly received your letter of the 5th, enclosing your article on ' Acting and Feeling,' which I have read with much interest, and trust you may find some sentence in my reply which may be of use to your next article.

" In early, untutored days I experienced great difficulty in preventing ' feeling' running away with me in scenes of emotion. Playing leading parts in very often crude melodrama to not very discriminating audiences, and having little experience, scanty rehearsals, and no producer to guide me, I relied upon ' feeling ' to carry conviction over the footlights. I always endeavoured to live each character, and that has been the joy of my work. I have supported many stars, and their methods have differed. Presumably temperament, youth, and age must be taken into account.

" In later years, when, getting an opening on the London stage, I had the advantage of working under skilled producers, I gained a knowledge of technique, of the art that conceals art, and of the necessary *restraint* of ' feeling ' ; but *always* ' feeling ' has been dominant as far as I personally am concerned.

" Whether my few remarks are of any value or not, I shall look forward to reading your next article."

Miss Haidée Wright :—

" Isn't it, after all, a matter of temperament ?

" I should judge the methods of an actor or actress to be moulded by their qualities.

" This one is naturally emotional—that is, sensitive to pain, mental or physical (we are talking, of course, of emotions, not hysteria), impersonal, intuitive.

" Here are the makings of a creative artist—I say the makings, for these qualities of themselves are like a rudderless boat, until hard work certainly, suffering perhaps, and what one might call good taste have disciplined that actor—taught him not only to feel, but to control.

" Another may not be emotional at all, let us say—but with an absorbing curiosity about, and interest in, human beings, an analytical mind, observant, critical, tireless—and have a keen sense of the theatre.

" His art then might conceivably consist of a power to absorb, to simulate, to reproduce.

" It is, again, perhaps a matter of temperament which actor you prefer, for the results, like the methods, will be different in their appeal.

" I think every artist should work out his own methods, but all art, if it isn't to be second-rate, should be creative, something evolved out of his own emotions or observations, intuitions or experiences—and hard work."

Mr. Allan Aynesworth writes :—

" I have read your article on ' Acting and Feeling ' with the greatest interest ! All you say, in my humble opinion, only goes to prove the bedrock truth that no actor can become master of his work unless he has the power of feeling himself to be the person he is representing.

" When Coquelin said that in Cyrano's speech often his thoughts wandered, it only may have meant that, though he was so great an actor, he had very likely never read anything of that vast body of philosophical literature which deals with the analysis of emotion. Plato, for instance, long ago pointed out that our thoughts may wander even as we stand beside the death-bed of our nearest and dearest. It may quite possibly be true enough that an actor who is master of his craft may be able, after he has played a part many consecutive times, to neglect concentration and at the same time give a performance which *will appear to the bulk of the audience as convincing;* but I much doubt whether the expert who *knew* that actor's worth wouldn't most certainly be able to tell you when he—the actor—was concentrating (*i.e.* feeling himself to be the person he was representing) and when he was not.

" What Coquelin perhaps may have had in his mind when he spoke of ' feeling ' was the supreme necessity for emotion being under *absolute control.* Whether a man be acting a part on the stage, or making a speech, or reading in public, the first thing of all (just as it is the first thing for the painter or the musician) is *sureness of touch—i. e.* master of his technique; and he must then use all the ' feeling ' or emotion he can command within the limits he has attained by the study of his technique."

Mr. George Grossmith :—

" In so far as my own experience is concerned, I heartily concur with Mr. J. T. Grein's article of the 3rd November; and most actors and actresses certainly know how to conceal Art to the extent of not only doing two things at once, but thinking out possibilities of a third.

" The sub-conscious mind of an actor becomes highly

developed, and most actors, when once their lines are assimilated, can and do devote a large amount of brain to matters utterly irrelevant. I will even go further, and say it is indeed almost impossible, after acting a part for a few months, to keep the mind concentrated upon it to the exclusion of everything else. It has actually occurred in more instances than one when some unlooked-for incident occurred during the play, such as someone fainting in the audience, that the actor awoke as from a dream, and just for the moment not only completely forgot what part he was playing, but that he was playing a part at all."

Mr. Lewis Casson :—

"My theory is this. The actor's life should be devoted to making his whole physical self, including his voice and every muscle of his face and body, the perfectly flexible instrument of his imagination, so that his every thought can instantly be translated at will into a form that suits the style of the play, and is audible or visible to his audience. During the rehearsal period, and in private preparation of a part, he should, with the assistance of his producer, stimulate his imagination at every moment of the play. Rehearsals and every performance of the play should be devoted to transferring more and more of the resultant actions (for actions—including, of course, words—are the only things of value to an audience) to registered mechanical form, leaving the imagination free to invent finer and finer shades of expression at each successive performance. Theoretically he follows a parabolic curve, ever approaching perfection but never reaching it. In practice an experienced actor very soon reaches a stage where so much has been transferred to mechanics that he can safely let his thoughts

wander far from the play without the average audience detecting the slightest variation from his best work. But that is *not* his best work, and the god who is the audience for whom the real artist plays (and perhaps some human audiences too) can see the difference."

Dr. Sybil Thorndike :—

"Do forgive my long delay in answering! Lewis has said everything I meant to say, only with such long words—longer words than I know! I think (and aim at) the *feeling* of a part should be done at rehearsal and during the time of study, and as far as possible converted into stage language, so that one is free in performance to perfect small details—which is not a possible thing without an audience who play with one. Hence the slight differences each night—differences scarcely noticeable to an audience, but to oneself immensely different. It's easy to say 'Don't feel' at performances. We aim at 'not feeling.' The great ones succeed; *we* don't always—we try! I'm no good at discussing the ways of it, so forgive me. One tries so many ways; I wish success were easier!"

Mr. Eile Norwood :—

"Whether an actor should feel or not feel the emotions his part may demand is, in my opinion, immaterial, so long as he is able to convey the impression that he *does* feel them. If the audience be held by his acting, his purpose is achieved. It is all they ask and all he desires. If an actor's personality—always his greatest asset—be such that he commands attention from the moment he appears on the stage, he will sway an audience more easily than one lacking it. They accept him and his interpretation as necessarily right, and because

he arouses their interest, they are more easily impressed and less inclined to criticise. As the run of the play continues, so does the actor improve—that is, if he be an artist. He becomes more sure of himself, more certain of the effects he can produce, and, like the practised juggler, his touch and skill will increase with repetition. Imagination, which every successful actor must possess, may frequently divert his thoughts into matters wholly unconnected with his part, but his experience and technique never cease to control his actions, or allow the audience to observe the lapse. So long as he remains master of himself, and the faithful servant of the public, what care they whether he really feels or not?"

Mr. Robert Atkin :—

"I regard a company acting a play as a conductor regards an orchestra. An orchestra does not project the emotions the composer wishes the composition to convey by real feeling in their playing, but by the technical mastery of their instruments: hence the conductor can call upon them to register any tone, speed, etc., necessary for the interpretation of the piece.

"The highest art is the suggestive art. Real feeling on the stage is very rare, and is only effective when the artist has complete mastery of the technical side of acting. One cannot register the same depth of real feeling at a given moment or moments night after night; but with a complete technical outfit one can register suggestion.

"I fully appreciate the part temperament plays in acting, and think the bigger the temperament the more necessary is the restraining hand of technique. Who could feel, or assume to feel (which often passes for feeling) such parts as Hamlet, Lear, or Othello without grave injury to health

and pain to an audience? But by perfect art their feelings can be suggested, and by deep study and rehearsal, subject to the temperament and sensitiveness of the artist, moments of real feeling will creep in, but not at the same points night after night.

"I consider the work at the Russian Blue Bird Theatre in 'The King Calls for His Drummer' as a triumph of suggestive art. Many a performance has been ruined by feeling mastering technique. I decidedly incline to the side of Coquelin, but recognise the racial differences in audiences. To perhaps the majority of English audiences a 'bit of real feeling' stamps the actor or actress as 'great.'

"Some years ago a certain prominent West End star was playing in a North-country town. After one performance his landlord, who had witnessed it, welcomed him on the front-door step with great enthusiasm, hailing him as the best actor in the piece. 'Oh, no,' replied the actor. 'Oh, yes,' went on the landlord; 'why, every time you spoke the veins in your neck stood out much more than any of the other actors' did'!

"When I was playing in 'Julius Cæsar' with the late Sir H. B. Tree, he would, during his most impassioned moments as Antony over the fallen body of Cæsar in the Capitol (when doubtless many of the audience thought he was feeling deeply), use my stomach to help himself from a prostrate position, daring me under his breath to twitch!"

Miss Mary Merrall:—

"So you would 'pluck out the "art" of my mystery'—you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass? No, Mr. Grein; there is much too much

music, excellent voice in this little organ, yet *you* cannot make it speak! I am a woman—as soon read the riddle of the Sphinx! No doubt the mere male creature to whom you have appealed will analyse and explain with much circumlocution the action and use in their art of all the minutest nerves in their body. But I—no! Were I to answer you I should be wearing my 'art' on my sleeve for daws to pick at!

"And were I willing, can it be explained why one does this, why one does that, how one does it? It seems to me art is the result of a million experiences—this life—that life—all recorded unconsciously by that mysterious 'other fellow' inside us: all these taken, selected, used. But how I use them? That is my secret, the secret of a woman. I would as soon reveal to you the mysteries of my toilet table."

Mr. Franklin Dyall writes:—

"In response to your invitation to take part in your symposium, I feel I have written and spoken so much on the subject that I shall be repeating myself. However—

"All artists, of course, should be able to feel; they should have temperament, quick, responsive, vibrating—a temperament to understand, to sympathise. But this should be used in an actor when rehearsing, when thinking, in finding the form—all art has form. When the final form is found, the last note of the 'song' settled on, and the whole fixed, then it can be presented complete to an audience—sure of your form, your tone, the emotions you are expressing. There are those who trust to the feeling of the moment, the 'all-right-on-the-night' people. I call them the 'all-right-on-the-night' *perhaps* people;

they are not, in my opinion, artists. They have personalities, which they exploit before the public; some nights good, some nights execrable. And the strain on the poor things! Fancy going through the real emotion one feels on the death of a dear friend or relative eight times a week! One would become an emotional wreck—as, indeed, there are some people who are carried back to their dressing-rooms nearly unconscious, and have to be massaged back to life. As Irving said, 'Why do it if it is unwholesome?'

"Surely art is artificial! That is to say, it is not real. What would we say of the painter who put a real diamond stud in the shirt-front in his celebrated picture 'Portrait of a Gentleman'! Of a sculptor who put real feathered wings on his 'Mercury'! (Though I have quarrelled with a dear friend, an eminent sculptor, for mixing up metal with marble.)

"Again, I cannot imagine a painter rushing at his canvas, his eye with a fine frenzy rolling, and at the height of his conception, slap—dash—on goes the paint—left—right—up and down—across—and hey-presto, his *magnum opus!* Or of a sculptor in front of a block of marble—staring at it until his conception is complete, then leaping like a lion on his prey—mane flying, eyeballs staring, seeing his goddess within and determined to get her out. I cannot conceive of a delicate tip-tilted nose being formed under such conditions! And I feel sure the lobe of her shell-like ear would be chipped off in the wild frenzy of such creation.

"And much more so with an actor or singer. Our body is our instrument; our voice our medium. And that voice must not be at the mercy of an emotion. If it is the right emotion, how can we be sure it will come? 'I can call

spirits from the vasty deep'; but will they come when you do call? No; you must feel to be able to act. To be able to act, you must not feel."

Mr. Courtice Pounds :—

"I have written a long screed, but second thoughts, nearly always best, made me tear it up. So please pardon my delay in answering your kind and flattering inquiry. Flattering, because I don't reckon myself to be a prominent actor. No; just an 'old pro' who goes on and does his best without theorising or analysing. Not that I don't take the greatest and most intense interest in everything belonging to the stage; in fact I have quite a large number of books pertaining to it. I have a little first edition of Diderot's 'L'Art du Comédien,' which I have read and re-read many times. But I can't write and I can't speak to any purpose; so I just think and hold my tongue. And I feel I should do that now. However, here goes as far as my personal experience is concerned.

"I have only played four parts that called for the display of emotion, and I have found that, while I don't actually 'feel' in them and forget for a moment I am playing a part, yet I cannot, as some seem able to do, allow my thoughts to stray for an instant outside the scene I am engaged in when it is an important one. No 'counting the house' or asking another to 'look at that lovely girl in the Royal Box'! This concentration does not prevent my weighing myself up as I go along, and carefully watching that I don't over- or underdo it. This tautness of nerves does take it out of one a little at times.

"All this is badly expressed and may seem foolish to you, but I have done it because I have such respect for you as a critic and regard for you as a man.

Miss Hilda Bayley :—

"Very many thanks for your letter and article and for wishing to include my humble opinion. I believe always that the important thing in emotional acting is to have the intense capacity for any emotion or suffering. The emotions must be felt to be conveyed. But if they are not sufficiently under the control of the mind of the artist they will overflow and submerge the very means by which the feelings are expressed.

"I fear these ideas are not expressed as *you* could express them!"

Miss Mary Clare :—

"What I have to say might be expressed in five words: I agree with Mr. Grein. But I think he expects me to illustrate that agreement from my, as yet, not very abundant experience. With me it is like this: normally there are two Mary Clares on the stage. One of her is just busy playing the part—I suppose the learned would call it my subconscious self. The other Mary Clare is calmly watching the actor Mary, like an engineer with a machine—directing, speeding, checking, and quite undisturbed by the emotion of the situation, quite separate from the actor.

When the dialogue is a trifle forced, a thought unnatural —when the situation is not inevitably true—then the gulf between the two halves of me is wide. The more natural the dialogue, the closer do they come together; and when the words I say are precisely what the character *would* say, then the two Mary Clares sometimes almost coincide. For moments at a time I may be said to live my part. And yet even then I think the cold, calculating Mary Clare is always ready to take command.

"Moreover (and this I find strange), when the emotion of such a scene is rising to a climax, once again the two halves separate, and I can even say to myself: 'You've a big moment coming. Mary Clare must look and feel so-and-so now, in order that she may do this and that naturally when the moment comes.' And all the while the other, the acting Mary Clare, will be sincerely thrilled and quickening to a white heat of enthusiasm. It's queer; yes, it's queer; for I do, as it were, step away from and look at myself—from the back, both of us facing the audience, as though I were working a live marionette for their entertainment.

"I do occasionally think of other things, things not connected with my part. That happens to every actor, and we all at times prompt each other. But only very seldom do I think of my home, my husband and children. I try not to do that; it would be dangerous; for the thought that one of the children had a cold, or would want some new clothes soon, would wipe out my part, so that I should 'dry up.'

"You must be very sure of yourself and your technique to do what I know some actors do—talk in an undertone to each other about everyday happenings, and make plans for to-morrow evening's excursion (which in my case is usually a predetermined jaunt for the films)."

Miss Margaret Bannerman:—

"To portray adequately a character in a play one must either have wonderful technique, which can only be gained by years of experience, or one must feel the part. By feeling the part I do not necessarily mean that one must run the whole gamut of emotions, but one has to imagine how one would behave under the circumstances the author has

described. Therefore in playing a part like that I am playing in 'Our Betters,' which has so many varied emotions, I find it is absolutely necessary to concentrate on whatever scenes are coming before I go on the stage. In other words, I do not think I could convince the audience of my sincerity in the character I am playing unless I convinced myself first.

"I am quite aware that some actors and actresses can go straight on the stage, breaking off a conversation about golf or dress, and start right away in some emotional or comedy scene; but, as I said before, I think this is the kind of acting which calls upon the technique of an artist, and not upon the imagination.

"As a last word, I do not mean to say that it is necessary to be a murderess to play the part of Lady Macbeth, but I do mean that, from my point of view, I should have emotionally to visualise what the feelings and actions of Lady Macbeth would be were I ever great enough artist to play the part."

Mr. Robert Loraine :—

"I think you have covered the ground in your article on 'Acting and Feeling' as far as it can be done so briefly. One does not want to stray into the very extensive field of conjecture which would be involved by a consideration of the double consciousness. It is clearly not necessary, as instanced in several stories in your article, that the actor should feel, intensely and exclusively, the emotion that he is portraying at the moment in order to affect his audience very strongly; but I think he should have his mind concentrated on an imaginative picture of that emotion, if he is to get the best results possible.

"Many actors of extraordinarily technical accomplish-

ment are able to stereotype a performance so that it is almost impossible to detect any lack of immediate inspiration, but, as you say, the important thing is the *projection* of the emotion, and I believe that this is done most effectively and powerfully and accurately when the actor *thinks* it so strongly himself that he transfers his thought to the audience. In other words, the important thing is not what the actor feels, but what he makes the audience feel.

"If like the young actor you tell of, who, in playing a scene by the bedside of his dying mother, was overcome by his emotion as a result of his own mother's recent death, it is pretty sure that he would not sway the emotions of an audience. At the same time, I would warn young actors against permitting themselves the licence which Coquelin confessed to when he said that he often thought of other things. I am afraid this isn't very good, but I shall look for other, better-expressed opinions in the course of the symposium with great interest."

Mr. George Arliss writes :—

"I always hesitate to give my opinion on the art of acting. On the judgment of other arts I am more courageous. I feel sure that I could offer valuable suggestions to the house-painter as I watch him at his work, or to the man who comes to put in a new stove; but I have not the same confidence in my ability to offer any really useful hints to actors. I think that the technique of the actor's art is more or less on hard-and-fast lines that can be laid down with some certainty, but beyond that the art of acting is so dependent upon the temperament and the method of the individual, the art of concealing art is so subtle and variable, that it seems futile to offer one's own impressions. But

Mr. Grein has done me the honour to invite my opinion on 'Acting and Feeling,' so I offer it merely as it applies to myself, without suggesting that it will be of value to another member of my own profession. Mr. Grein has cited several cases designed apparently to show that it is not necessary for the actor to feel his part in order to move his audience.

"There can be little doubt that in certain telling situations supplied by the author, an actor who is master of his art can move an audience without himself being moved; and I have heard many instances where the play is so appealing that even a bad actor incapable of great feeling has succeeded in making a deep impression upon his audience. But if it is suggested that it is an actual advantage for the actor to abstain from feeling the emotions that he is intended to arouse, then I am bound to say that this is entirely contrary to my own conviction. However great an impression an actor may create by this method, I can never be convinced that he would not have made a still deeper impression if he had felt the emotion himself. Surely the best and truest acting must come from within, and not be merely external. I am not in favour of an actor who is so emotional that he gives a different performance every night; as a rule he is a temperamental performer but not a good actor. In my opinion the best actor is likely to be the man who forms an absolutely fixed opinion of his character during the period of rehearsal and maintains his creation during the entire run of the play. But that is not to say he may not improve it in detail, and I fail to see how he is to enrich his performance if he does not feel it. He cannot be guided by laughs or applause from the front. To gauge success by these audible punctuation marks is most dangerous and is liable to lead to destruction.

Then how are we to get these sudden flashes that enrich a performance, and that only appear when an actor comes in contact with an audience—how are we to get them if we do not feel?

"Coquelin had a great personality, and could act while thinking of other things with less detriment to his reputation than the majority of actors. I find that if I think of other things my audience follows my example, and I am recalled by hearing cough, cough, cough from different quarters of the house. If I then pull myself together and think of what I am doing, I can generally succeed in bringing the audience back again. And I can't help wondering what happened to Coquelin's eyes when he was thinking of other things. An actor who has ever played in the 'movies' will have discovered that the camera registers thought through the eyes; the most fleeting emotion is recorded, and the camera has no mercy on the actor who is thinking of other things or is incapable of imagination; and what the camera sees, the audience sees—in a lesser degree perhaps, but sufficiently plainly. My opinion is that the eyes are the actor's most valuable assistants if legitimately used, and that they cannot truly register an emotion that is not behind them.

"The instances given by Mr. Grein of the young lady who was so overcome by her emotion that she burst into such floods of tears that the audience were dissolved in laughter, is no argument against feeling. She didn't know her business; she was not a trained actress.

"Acting is an art, not merely an exhibition of emotions. An actor doesn't lose himself on the stage: if he did there would be nothing to prevent his walking off the stage in his transports of emotion and finishing his big scene in Piccadilly Circus. But his emotion need be no less sincere because

it is harnessed; it may be just as true. In real life we have to exercise control. When we are in the greatest distress we are generally conscious that we must not make an exhibition of ourselves, but we do not feel our grief any the less poignantly. And so in feeling on the stage; the fact that we are conscious of our audience and of the mechanical limitations of the theatre should not prevent the trained actor from deep feeling.

"My opinion is that the practised actor is at his best when he feels the emotion that he is attempting to convey to his audience."

Mr. Lyall Swete:—

"'There are other men fitter to go out than I.' Still, the born actor—like Coquelin—would seem to be a law unto himself; no doubt there have been, and are, many others. Edmund Kean could find time in the middle of a most impassioned speech to bid the person he was addressing to 'get out of my focus,' and I can imagine that sort of lightning detachment from his or her part is not rare now with many of us. Not being born (and even now but three parts baked) an actor, such detachment would inevitably make me 'dry up.' For myself, I should say all acting is founded on feeling whatever emotion, comic or tragic, and all *the differences between, that one wishes to portray.* Intellectual intelligence can only add to our aridity. Can one make an audience laugh without feeling merry and bright or having at least a sense of the fun of it all, or perhaps being the merrier the unfunnier it all is? And the same with tears. Time makes threadbare our richest emotions, and, by contrast, repetition in the long runs we hope for, and deplore, the bare bones must often show through. Exceptional Coquelin! Yet it would be fairer to your

discussions to have asked him what he thought of on the *first* night, not when his Cyrano had become a household word. Yes, I believe we *must* feel, but all must be disciplined, under control. Rehearsals are not for words alone. Some of the greatest artists I have seen have never made me cry; others, whom I rank as high, have made me weep unendurably—Lady Bancroft, Mrs. Kendal, Sir Johnstone Forbes Robertson, and Sir Gerald du Maurier. I cannot believe that their acting was not inspired but by the deepest feeling, kept under perfect control. Why not ask of these still with us what they feel? And three of the above have given me as much laughter as my sides would bear. Just as we find, if we grow old properly, our hearts are elastic and find room to love so very many of our fellow-men, so would it seem that the seat of the emotions, heart or head, in an actor can find room for many thoughts and yet keep right on doing justice to himself and to his author. And that is my best thought. Drop the actors, and ask the *authors* what they *do* or do *not* feel when they write our parts. My word for it, there's feeling enough to equip a dozen Coquelins! And if they *feel*—as feel they must—there's no question what we should do. For, after all, 'the play's the thing.'"

Mr. Lawrence Anderson:—

"I think that if an actor thoroughly understands the situation and the atmosphere created by the author, and if, in addition, he can feel both these relatively to the effect on the mind of the audience, that he will get the feeling over. I think one is perhaps apt to lessen one's effect in a scene by playing the same piece a number of times, and that is what I think we should strive for—always to bring the original mentality to the part—to consider the

situation as we did when we first played it to a personally critical audience. That is how I regard 'feeling' on the stage myself. I always try to visualise three things :—

" 1. The effect the author meant.

" 2. The effect I can have with the other people in relation to the author.

" 3. How I did it originally with these ideas in my mind.

" I hope this will express to you what I feel."

Mr. Ralph Lynn :—

" I have read your article, 'Acting and Feeling,' with great interest.

" To the question, 'Do actors feel?' I can only make reply by trying my best to explain how much I personally feel a part and how much I do not. My job is nearly always to be funny, and to be so successfully I find that I have to work myself into a certain mood—let me call it a funny mood—but my mind must be always concentrated on restraining and covering up any obvious efforts to be funny.

" To the actor who has to portray the lover, I should think it amounts to very much the same thing : his mood must be the mood of the lover whilst his thoughts are busy with technique. This lover could make love to a cabbage with as much sincerity as he could to the beautiful, moon-eyed heroine. In fact, if the lassie happened to be endowed with a voice that sounded like trickling water on corrugated iron, then the cabbage would be preferable, for the unkind noise would jar the actor and put him out of mood.

" To feel a part with emotion of any horse-power is to be too far up the right street, in my opinion. I have seen so many ineffectual displays of real emotion that I have long since decided that sincerity is as far as one should go : to be sincerely sad or to be sincerely funny ; the rest

is technique. More than this I do not feel on the stage; but I feel now that this confession may cost me my job."

Miss Constance Collier writes :—

"I feel so interested in the correspondence on the subject of emotion in acting. In my humble opinion, the chief asset of an artist's equipment is imagination. One must imagine how a mother would feel if she had to kill her baby. You can't very well kill the baby to get the true emotion for the stage, and probably the thing you act is not in the least how a mother would behave if she killed her baby. But as long as you convince the audience that a mother might behave in that manner, the result is the same.

"M. Coquelin, when I was a girl, once said to me two things about acting that I have remembered and tried to work upon. The first thing was: 'You build a house, a solid building, and it has many windows—that's technique. Sometimes you can put a light in that house—that is inspiration. In any case, the house is always there.' That has helped me very much to build my house, when my new parts come along. Whether I can be inspired or not is a different matter. He also said that the true art of acting is elimination—another splendid lesson for me. The less one does, the more effective—as in real life; when things touch us deeply we are singularly simple. It is the little something that is too much that makes for unreality on the stage. 'The little more, and how much it is—the little less, and what worlds away!'"

Mr. Seymour Hicks writes :—

"Of course the question you ask me to answer is one that has been, as you know, the bone of contention among the theatrical giants throughout the age.

"I have always thought that Art and Heart were a happily married couple, and that their household, the theatre, would be a very unhappy one if they were divorced. If a question arose as to which of these contracting parties would be the most at sea bereft of a partner, I should undoubtedly say Heart. Personally, it has been my experience that sometimes when, through illness or some other cause, one has played quite mechanically and felt nothing, the applause has been greater; and that often when one has thought things most and shed real tears, the audience has not responded as one thought it might. But as to the question of being purely mechanical and moving an audience, I am quite sure that it is only a very great actor who could afford to take such a liberty; and his effects must surely be gained, although he is feeling nothing, by subconsciously taking a print from a negative which was the great original conception. I stood on a corner of the Adelphi Theatre within three or four yards of Sarah Bernhardt when she played Hamlet, and in the Grave scene, when she said, 'Alas, poor Yorick—I knew him well!' I was deeply moved, as apparently she was; but a moment afterwards she had her back to the audience, and was quite mechanically directing the supers in the funeral procession.

"I have seen Henry Irving cry in 'The Vicar of Wakefield,' 'King Lear,' and 'Charles I,' and I have seen him get mighty applause for doing exactly the same thing but at the same time being in a passion about some stage mishap. Obviously, therefore, he could not be thinking of two things at once, and yet the effect, as he had first designed it, was obtained purely by mechanical means. Surely, therefore, is it not Heart teaches Art? And it is possible for Art, having learnt its lesson, to stand alone; but I cannot help feeling that when one reads in the diaries

of great actors such lines as 'I did not play well to-night,' it must have meant, more often than not that, although the audience applauded them, they themselves were not satisfied, in that mechanical means alone produced the result, which can give no real artist real pleasure.

"I am afraid I have expressed myself very badly. I know what I mean, though I cannot tell you; but I have done my best, so I know you will forgive me."

XL

November 10th, 1923.

ON THE READING OF PLAYS

"If you can find me a man who, after reading a play, can predict its success on the stage, I will give him 1,000,000 dollars per annum and a share in the profits." Thus a well-known American manager who prided himself on his own judgment and confessed to as many frosts as successes. "It often pans out otherwise than one expects," he went on. "You may read a play, be roused to enthusiasm, put it in rehearsal, hear all around you auspicious predictions. Then comes the first night, and you find that what warmed you to enthusiasm leaves the audience cold. Again, after a failure, you are a little discouraged, diffident; you run through your manuscripts, put on something in a hurry, which you merely consider as a 'stopgap,' and lo and behold! it catches on and runs for a year or more. People talk of the optics of the theatre: I know what it means, but I'm hanged if I know what it is! There is something between the written page and plastic representation which defies human speculation." With that I agreed, and I proceeded to ask: "Did you find your man?" "Yes," he said; "at least I thought I did, and I sent him to France, Germany, Austria, as the home harvest was poor, and he came back with a bag full. All had been great successes, so I ventured one or two by his advice, and, I admit, was in accord with him after perusal. The result was negative. What 'enthused' the Parisians and the Viennese was not grasped by my public. We made the mistake of not taking into

account the mentality of the different countries. There are subjects which seem of international portent, and when you transplant them into another language they lose power and character."

There is another snare into which we are apt to fall: the author's own reading. True, some of them read so badly that they defeat their own ends. In their case the best policy is to say nothing and to take the MS. home and form one's own opinion. Others—and there lies the danger—read so entrancingly that they carry their hearers away. That was the case with Sardou. To hear him was to see the play. His voice acted like a charm; every part stood out a distinct individuality. It was as if one saw the performance. And, as Sardou was a great craftsman whose instinct of the theatre was unrivalled, the play, when acted, mostly had the same effect as in its recitation. But twice Sardou made two signal miscalculations. The one was the spectacular play "Le Crocodile," of which the director said after reading, "We all felt enchanted, as if in fairy-land." It failed, and the very scene that had enraptured the actors when they listened to his magic voice, fell as flat as empty bags. The other was "Spiritisme"—his effort to materialise the power of the spiritual. Again the hearers were spellbound. They professed to have gazed into an atmosphere which was far away from all human reality. A séance could not have held them in more supernatural thrall. What happened at rehearsal is not related, but the *première* was a fiasco. The sublime became ridiculous. Had it not been Sardou, the master, the public would have laughed it to scorn. It ran a few nights, and although some said that it would bear revival when alterations removed obstacles caused by imperfect stage-effects, Sardou would not hear of it. He was heartily dismayed, for he himself had expected a triumph, and placed the work

far above some of the plays which had made him world-famous.

My own experiences as a reader of countless plays are weird and wonderful. I remember a well-known author, who has never experienced failure, reading a comedy. He read it exceedingly well, but its humour was so elusive, its story so seemingly thin, that it did not hold me. To be frank, I had to rub my eyes to keep them open, although I am a fervent admirer of the dramatist. When the play was produced the effect was totally different. Every line went home. The story was fascinating, the public, including myself, vastly amused. The acting had changed the complexion of the play. What one man's voice could not achieve became vital by the differentiation of personalities.

Another experience. A well-known manager brought me a comedy which he had written in collaboration with an authoress needing technical assistance. I read it with benevolent eyes. I did not like it, was bored, and had the courage to say so. The authors were happy in their choice of their heroine. She ensnared the audience by her youth, charm, spontaneous humour. The success was enormous —like "Charley's Aunt," it is still running. What was the cause? For one, the acting; but it was the theme that did it; a penny novelette theme I called it, but it caught on. All the little who read picture papers took it to their hearts. The manager was right, I was wrong; I misunderstood in that instance the mentality of the pit and gallery—they dearly love a lord. The same manager had a farce brought to him. He is a very acute man, a playwright, an actor of renown. More than once had his judgment proved as safe as houses—see above. He read the farce, and, perhaps because he did not see himself in it, he turned it down. That farce, mainly, I admit, through the genius and personality of the chief comedian, took

London by storm, made a fortune. But the manager who refused it is still asking why he did not see it when he read the play.

Of course one is not always wrong when acting merely as a reader. I remember a play of 1921—one of the few successes of that disastrous year. It had passed through many hands and been returned with thanks. Then it came to a manager who sometimes honours me by asking for the casting vote. He wavered. I asked him to say no more, but to let me read it. I was enchanted. The play stood clear before my eyes. It was so simple and so true that in my study I saw the vision, heard the voices. I rushed to the telephone. "A winner," I said, "or I will forfeit my name!" It was a gorgeous first night, that of "The Faithful Heart," whose author's name is Monckton Hoffe and the happy manager's Leon M. Lion.

Soon afterwards I was called upon to judge another play by a famous author—one of those plays that managers would take blindfolded for the sake of the name attached to it. I read it; but somehow it did not get "under my skin." Clever it was, beyond a doubt, and boldly original; but it was the kind of play to which the British public would maybe not take kindly. The end was not only inconclusive but ethically unpleasant, and in the working out there was much that might not be rightly understood. Still the name prevailed. The play was produced and received with the respect due to its parentage. But criticism was mainly destructive and the box-office lukewarm. I had once again, but in the negative sense, thrown a correct forecast. I could go on quoting, could name many plays which I had turned down, persuaded my consultant not to risk, and saw them founder when other more speculative managers staked their money on them. No doubt experience, and the principle of not reading too many plays

one after the other, but of allowing space for reflection, digestion, clearness of vision, may in a way lead to greater surety of judgment ; but, I repeat, the science of the theatre, if so I may christen it, is an unprecise one, not only because there are no rules or hard-and-fast methods of technique, but because the reader has but one mind and cannot simply predict how a play will affect the hydra of the multitude. I fear that my American with his 100,000 dollars will roam about in vain, like a modern Diogenes, in quest of a superman. Play-reading remains for ever a speculation, and all the knowledge of the World of the Theatre cannot raise it beyond the justifiable gamble of *rouge et noir*.

XLI

November 17th, 1923.

FANTASIA IN CAMBERWELL

TUCKED away in the unpoetic purlieus of Camberwell, off the beaten track, there flourishes a little realm of imagination under the dynasty of Joseph Harker. Here parks are laid out, cities planned, houses and cottages built; here flow rivers and roll seas; here reigns azure or cloudland at command; here the sun never may set, nor the moon cease to shine; here history is made and revived to order; here is a panorama. You have but to say the word and the Harkers will "place the world before you."

Some fifty-five years ago, a young boy from Manchester, his head full of thoughts and imagination, came to London, bent on conquest. He came to his uncle, the famous scene-painter, John O'Connor, and was set to work in the Adelphi when the Thames flowed by Water Gate and all the poetry of the Great City was, as it were, in the air. The uncle was not slow in discovering the boy's talent for throwing on canvas what his eyes saw, and ere long he became his right hand, and then his successor. The Haymarket Theatre became his springboard; from 1870 till to-day Joseph Harker has painted the scenery for that theatre, and, despite his sixty-seven years, when the clock strikes nine he grips palette and brush and paints with juvenile ardour and an undimmed eye. But as the business grew, so, luckily, did the family. Of the six sons, Phil, the eldest, is his partner—the ubiquitous spirit who knows all the secrets of his art,

who has travelled from classic Italy to the Orient, who can conjure up before your eyes the wonders of the Arabian Nights in "Chu Chin Chow" or a vista of the Sahara, to say nothing of the castles of France and England or the streets of London. Phil and his father are the master-minds. His brothers are his helpmates, and every one of them specialises in a branch of his own. Joe paints the heraldry; Roland is the expert in figures; Colin, the youngest, plans the interiors; and, if Gordon has gone on the stage and recently made a success in "Robert E. Lee," should there come a rush he would still be ready to lend a hand. The Harker dynasty is built on stable foundations.

Behold them at work in the immense loft. The father is busy studying in a London book how St. James's Park looked in the eighteenth century, and, with a glance now and again at an old print, he creates with powerful strokes a picture of the past. His is an eagle eye. The sense of proportion is his gift. He scents perspective. From the distance in the playhouse this mass of colour will form a harmonious picture. Joe is busy painting a heraldic figure on a panel. He has just reproduced a Rembrandtian portrait in a fragment of a wall. Anon he will have made a faithful copy of a room in St. James's Palace. It will be the same room as it is now in reality, but the woodwork will be more shiny; in their striving after realism the Harkers duly take into account that, like human beings, woodwork shows the mark of time. "For," says Mr. Phil Harker, showing me a wonderful model of the Throne Room in Versailles Palace, "we would call our art realistic. We have but one aim, and that is to convey to the eye of the spectator things as they really are. Look at this back-cloth of a park at night; compare it with the room that looks out on it. The one seems hazy, for it is shrouded in

darkness; the other is vivid and precise. That is how you will see it in the theatre."

I asked him if he always made models. "No," he said; "only if we are asked for them—mainly by new managers. To the others we submit merely a sketch—here is one for Fred Terry's new play—they leave the rest to us." And he explained to me how from the sketch grow the carpentry measurements, the canvas, all the parts that will complete the picture.

"So, after you have had your chat with the producer and the manager, you go ahead practically as you please. All these marvels you did for Irving and Tree—'The Dead Heart,' 'Henry VIII,' 'Macbeth,' 'Nero,' 'Ulysses,' 'Julius Cæsar,' and later, for Oscar Asche, 'Kismet,' 'Chu Chin Chow,' to name but a few in a stupendous record—all these reincarnations of times and places are to a certain extent children of your own fantasy? It is marvellous!"

And Phil Harker said: "Sometimes we have had the guidance of great masters, and our proudest collaboration was with Alma-Tadema—who carried the whole of old Rome in his imagination—in 'Julius Cæsar.' When he was pleased, and in 1898 paid us an unsolicited tribute, we felt happy and secure."

From that production of "Julius Cæsar" the fame of the Harkers spread. Work, which is the joy of their lives, came in shoals to them. Unerringly they proceed and perfect their art. Tucked away in the purlieus of unpoetic Camberwell flourishes the realm of Fantasia, and to enter its domain is like a journey on the Magic Carpet.

XLII

January 5th, 1924.

GESTURES ON THE STAGE

The intelligent foreigner who makes his first acquaintance with the English stage records his first impressions with threefold observation. "When your actors represent gentlemen," he says, "they are gentlemen; when your actresses portray ladies they are ladies; but how impassive they both are! How mechanical and poor are their gestures!" Which remark, by the way, immediately recalls an *obiter dictum* of Robert Buchanan, too good to be lost.

Years ago, when all the World of the Theatre was in a turmoil because Clement Scott in an interview had made some comments about the morals of the stage which might have been otherwise expressed, the Scottish novelist exclaimed, "Yes, yes; Scott's opponents are quite right; the English stage is full of ladies, but we have only six actresses." Fortunately, of late, we have greatly added to their number, but still the criticism maintains some *raison d'être*. For, if diction has made progress, there are still far too many actresses, notably in musical comedy, who have yet to learn that gesture is an essential part of their equipment. It applies less to men. To gesticulate profusely is neither correct from the English male point of view, nor is it consistent with the English character. We accept it in Irishmen and Welshmen, for it harmonises with blood and features; but to an Englishman, and even more to a

Scot, vivacious play seems always comic—hence the undying mockery of the Latin races on the music-halls, with arms swaying like windmills and wild fingers ploughing air and hair. The Englishman gesticulates in emphasis, in distress, in farcical situations, but in conversational scenes he restricts gesture to a minimum, relying on his eyes, his smile, and the inflection of his voice, and thereby attains the desired effect. As soon as he indulges in exuberance—for instance, when he has to portray a French character in an adaptation —he becomes unnatural, not to say absurd.

But that which would become a fault in our actors would be an acquisition to our actresses, of whom a great many have no idea what to do with their hands and arms.

Expressiveness by hands—what a marvellous thing it is! Look at Duse. It is not only what she utters that holds us: it is the eloquence of her hands, so beautiful of mould. The flexibility of her fingers, the curves she draws, the way she lays her hands on table, on shoulders—how it kindles our imagination; how it intensifies the action! And now recall how our actresses neglect these wonderful helpmates. They will let their arms dangle by their sides; they will clasp their fingers as if in prayer; they will cross their arms to express determination and command; but they rarely realise that movements are as graceful as the magic wand—that one gesture, one motion, one arabesque drawn around the words, may convey a world of meaning. Remember Marie Tempest's entrance through the garden gate in Chapin's "Art and Opportunity." How she stood there, and by the handling of her parasol indicated that now she had come on the scene she would be the mistress of the situation and no mistake! To teach freedom of gesture should be, next to diction, the first object of our academies. Words wedded to significant movements gain

immensely in force of conveyance. Of course, to a certain extent, this gift should be innate, and it is extremely difficult to teach; but it can be done, as I have seen it at the Conservatoire of Paris under Gott, who used to say, "Children, of course you will listen to what I say, but I beg of you to pay even greater attention to my 'illustrations.'" Then he would give them a scene of Molière, and underline his speech, whenever the text warranted it, with appropriate gestures. And he would wind up with the exhortation, "Remember that *jouer* [which is the equivalent of our "acting"] is not only to say things but to do them: when you play in the nursery, half the fun comes from your hands, your arms, and your feet."

That word "feet" sounded novel and strange to me. I had never thought of that—although I do now observe how few actresses are graced with the foot of natural measure, which they hardly know how to shoe. It was Mdlle. Lanthelme, the famous young actress, who in conversation made me see the importance of feet. "With the point of the foot," she said—whilst I admired the exquisite art of her *bottier*—"you can create unfathomable mystery, or doubt, or anguish, or you can incite passion and heroic deeds. The foot is as great a power as the fan, provided always"—and here comes the real Parisienne—"that you have a shoe to fit it in the right harmony and proportion to your personality." I fully realised what she meant when I came back to England, and immediately on my return had to witness a first night in which a very well-known leading lady was the heroine. She was a woman of charm, but she had big feet. She interested her audience, but she rarely magnetised them. I had often asked myself why? Why does she not get "under our skin"? That evening I looked at her feet, and thinking of Lanthelme,

I understood. Those feet, shod to emphasise, not to minimise, their size—clumsy, inert, characterless—acted like a wet blanket. It was like Cyrano's nose. A phantom stood 'twixt passion and imagination. Oh, those feet, those feet! I had come to pray and remained to scoff—at her bootmaker.

XLIII

January 12th, 1924.

THE DECLINE OF DRAMATIC CRITICISM

"The greater the circulation, the less the concession of space to dramatic criticism." It was uttered at a club table, and it stirred us all. Here was, in a nutshell, an observation made by all friends of the theatre, but rarely expressed. Of the London dailies but five allow adequate space for serious discussion of new plays and the drama in general. One has to turn to the Sunday papers for critical contemplations which are not thrown hotfoot. In plain words, the dramatic critic is gradually ousted by the paragraphist. Where a column is given to boxing, racing, or the health of a favourite, a mere fraction must suffice for the consideration of a play which may have cost its author months of creative work and its interpreters many weeks of hard labour. Besides, as the papers go to press before midnight, and the curtain falls generally about eleven, what time is there left, after the journey to the office, for contemplation and balancing of scales? Slapdash, the critic, is compelled to jot down his impressions in snippets, and the result is something that may be readable, but is necessarily superficial, and, where the actors are concerned, a few remarks about the "stars," "lathering" adjectives for a bunch of the lesser lights.

How I admire some of my colleagues for their brain-power, to achieve what they do in as many quarters of an hour as we of the weekly press may digest in hours! How I feel for some of them when even that which they write,

in frantic haste and anxiety to mete out justice, appears the next morning mangled, disembowelled, often meaningless! A young critic who occupies an important post was recently my neighbour at a feast, and, probably because I am a veteran in years—though, in the wake of the late Miss Georgina Weldon, I could well claim, "My complexion is sixty, but my mind is eighteen"—he said, "I don't know what you think of me when you read my stuff. In the evening I deliver what, under the circumstances, I may consider a healthy baby, and in the morning I cannot recognise my own child. What happens is this: In the *entr'actes* I marshal my facts, make notes, write my preamble; then in the office I outline the plot and deal with the actors; and, in spite of the printer's devils at my heels, I have trained myself to turn out something that has form and (I hope) sense. Then my copy goes to the News Editor, and as it often occurs, at a late hour, that some political or other topical reports come in, space must be found, and the blue pencil picks out dramatic criticism as the most suitable victim. The blue pencil of the News Editor—can you fathom what that means?—the blue pencil of a man who lives on 'stunts' and who has no soul or feeling for art of any description! What is left has neither head nor tail, although I admit that a little is left somewhere in the middle which may convince the reader that, if I am an idiot, I am not quite a blithering one. But imagine my feelings, my blushes, and my anger that this mangled farrago is supposed to be my work, the best I can do! Can you not imagine that it kills my love for my job?"

Of course I can imagine it. Once upon a time I saw my own mental children thus tortured on a bed of Procrustes because my proprietor wanted to supersede me, and decreed that my space should be curtailed so as to tire me out and make me throw up the sponge. But as I was

a worker in the City, knowing the precarious existence of a dramatic critic, I made up my mind to grin and bear it, and, in the end, through circumstances too long to relate, I won the day. But suppose that I had been in the shoes of my colleague who poured out his woes—that my post had meant the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker—what a horrible existence it would have been! On the one side, disheartening; on the other, the fell necessity to carry on lest I should find myself out of work.

For this is a fact—and St. John Ervine, who has now left our ranks to devote himself to play-writing, has said it drastically in his valediction: "The average critic employed by the newspaper magnate lives in fear of his existence." He must submit to the indignity of wanton cutting (never mind whether thereby his reputation suffers); he must obey orders in every direction—sometimes where praise or censure is concerned—regardless of his conscience. His protest goes for nought: at best it shakes his position; at worst it means—the door. So, to make the two ends meet, he has practically to submit to subordination—if not of his honour, at least of his pride. "Quel métier!" the Frenchman might well exclaim, as he listened to the pronouncement at the head of this article.

Now, what is the cause of this Cinderella-plight of dramatic criticism? Is it because the newspaper proprietor, who does not care a fig for art, but is only cocksure that he always gauges "what the public wants," considers dramatic criticism negligible, superfluous, waste of space? Is it because he looks upon the theatre as a plaything that can remain well content with puffs and piffling paragraphs? Is it because he holds that the play does not matter, nor the actor's achievement, but that, as the latter is in the public eye, his daily doings will be greedily read? Is it, lastly, because he feels sure that in these days of hurry and

appetite for the sensational the newspaper-reader has neither the patience nor the leisure to wade through a lengthy discussion of a play?

Whatever these and more considerations may be—and I know that they are the immediate cause of the decline of dramatic criticism in many papers I could name—they are all fallacious. The public does like to read dramatic criticism, if it is capable and illuminating. Ask the *Daily Telegraph* which day of the week its circulation is largest—is it not on Thursdays, when a whole page is devoted to the drama? Ask the *Christian Science Monitor* of Boston, whose Tuesday's issue, with theatrical criticism from all parts of the world, is a prominent feature. Ask the Sunday readers how they look out for the essays on the theatre and music. For once the magnates of our Press are wrong, both practically and ethically. Their neglect of the serious consideration of the drama is detrimental to the progress of the theatre as well as to their exchequer. I wager that if our great dailies would treat the theatre on the same footing as politics and sport, then their big circulations would still grow by leaps and bounds. For though the theatre may not be in the blood of the nation, yet it is certainly the pet child of its imagination. Wherefore I venture to say that to relegate dramatic criticism to the background is to deprive their readers of a great source of interest and to fail in the duty of leadership.

XLIV

January 19th, 1924.

THE PLIGHT OF THE UNEMPLOYED—ONCE MORE

It was in a manager's office. In the ante-room half a dozen people were lingering. The stairs were never quiet; up and down people came and went. He was sitting at his desk; a pile of letters, neatly clipped together, lay before him, and on top a sheet of foolscap—a long time-table allotting five minutes to every correspondent. "Look at it!" he said, "a week-end's harvest—two score of applicants for my new play, with a cast of ten or, with understudies, fifteen, all told!" We went through the list of names. The majority were unknown; provincial actors, no doubt, in quest of London fame and lured by it to give up a pretty certain if inglorious existence. For you may be a star in the provinces and loaded with sheaves of printed laurels, but London knows you not. There is a gulf wider than the Straits of Dover between the Metropolis and the county capitals. Sometimes by a fluke, a face, a personality or insistent "protection," one or two of these "mute inglorious" may find a billet; sometimes—all too rarely—their luck is to step in at the moment when somebody else has unexpectedly dropped out; but on the whole theirs is a desperate struggle, and Heaven knows what becomes of them. If they are lucky, they may be taken back in the provincial fold; if not, you may find them in all sorts of jobs. I met a man the other day who had played fairly important Shakespearean parts on the road. He looked thin and shabby; he tried to avoid me, as people are

inclined to do when they are down on their luck. Yet I could not let him pass, and begged him to tell me his tale. He hesitated. "Come," I said, "I know you to be honest and full of resource; you are surely not ashamed of what you are doing?" Then he confessed. He was addressing envelopes at one-and-three a thousand. Of course I humoured him, gave him a few hints and a warm introduction. As he was very business-like and gifted, for a wonder, he was taken up, and when I saw him next he was spruce, had put on flesh, and was "full of beans." He has become the right-hand man of a touring manager. But he was an exception, and I could tell of other encounters —one at the police court, a pretty girl of eighteen in the dock for following the easiest way. And the cause was that a bogus manager failed to pay her her miserable salary of thirty-five shillings a week, left her stranded at St. Pancras without a sou in her pocket, without a roof, without friends. In this case the missionary took her up and got her shelter in a hostel—a hostel of charity after prancing in gay costumes in revue and being accustomed to Bohemian life! What can become of such a girl?

As these reflections passed through my mind while the manager scrutinised his list, I heard him exclaim: "It is heart-breaking! Look at this—and that—and this"—and one after the other he handed me up letters signed by well-known names: names that everybody recalls; names that have been placarded on London walls in letters inches long; names that convey to the man in the street big salaries and a nest-egg for the rest of their lives. Such is the fallacy of glamour. In reality they were begging—yes, begging—for a job at any salary the manager wished to give; for they had been for months and months out of work, with all resources drained and uncle-pawnbroker their only friend. They were "out" through no fault

of their own. In London there was no room for them. Revue and musical plays, both beyond their sphere, had narrowed the radius of the "legitimate," and in the provinces business was so bad that tours were disbanded for want of support. One of them, an actress who had done much good work, confessed that in two years she had had but five weeks' employ. How do such people live? "I see them all," said my friend, "but can you wonder at it that after these sad meetings I feel like a limp rag? What is the good of advice and guidance when you know that there is but one prescription for remedy, and it is written on a slip of latitude, not longitude—a cheque?"

I could add a good deal of my own experience. It is not only the manager who is beleaguered; the critic, too, is constantly asked to lend a hand and show the way. And what can the critic do for an unemployed actor? The fewest have a voice with managers; they rarely know what is going on when plays are in the making. Though they be willing to help, their levering cannot function until after the curtain is raised. Still, any straw would seem to promise salvage to a drowning soul, and so the critic as well as the manager has his days when he feels limp as a rag because talent has knocked at his door in vain appeal.

The truth is that the profession is sadly overstocked and badly organised. It is overstocked because so many people flock to the stage who, as it were, take the bread out of the mouth of the real workers. The good-looking man who has learned no particular trade and hates the City, who has a good home and pocket-money, seeks the stage because it is a pleasant life full of variety. The girl in similar condition, who is bored at home and inflamed by paragraphs in picture-papers, seeks the stage because it gratifies her vanity and means *éclat*. They may have a little talent, but they have no business to oust workers. It would be well

to ask all such aspirants, "Are you going on the stage of necessity or merely because you like the profession?" (that "because I like the profession" is frequent and significant), and then to send them hence with a sound remonstrance for seeking as a pastime that which to others means existence.

The organisation of the profession is defective, and this I say with due deference to and appreciation of the Actors' Association, which could be a power if the leading actors and actresses, those who have arrived and by unity could create force, were to support and endow it with their might. The A.A. should be the active Labour Exchange, the focus of employers and workers. Were it modelled on the principle of the German Buehnengenossenschaft (Stage Association), to which every manager is bound in allegiance and applies for the actors he wants, there would be hardly any unemployment. In Germany actors out of a billet are rare, and generally, for one reason or another, the jetsam of the profession. But here, how is the actor out of work to get on? He may have an agent, but they are as overrun as the managers, and very few of them have a voice in the casting of plays, which is done in a haphazard way in the directorial circle. When the news of coming plays gets into the papers, it is generally no use to apply for a part; by that time all are filled. Of course you may pay calls—and how often are you received and in what manner? Of course you may write letters till you are black in the face; how many are answered, or, if so honoured, otherwise than by a mere formula or a "later on, perhaps"? How is the unemployed actor to get on? I repeat; for even those who can afford to advertise in theatrical papers will admit that, in the great majority of cases, their money could have been more usefully employed. I wish I could proffer an effective reply to remedy the terrible plight. And so

things will go from bad to worse, and misery and hunger will have to be endured in secret until some man or woman in the profession will arise to take this vital matter in hand and organise the dramatic profession on a business-like footing. If such a move were supported by the great municipalities—following the splendid example of Bristol, where the Repertory movement is aided in the city—the whole of things might change.

The question now is : Who will put his shoulder to the wheel ?

XLV

January 26th, 1924.

THE RAVEN AND THE CARRIER-PIGEON

It was one of those drizzling days when nobody feels in cheerful mood and grousing takes the place of the cheery smile or the latest joke at the luncheon table in the Club. Of course the theatre was on the "tapis," and one of the circle —one who hears the birds whisper; ay, the worms grouse! —who knows all the news from scandal to box-office figures, led off with the mournful remark: "The theatres are feeling the draught: election, Labour Cabinet, Christmas aftermath, children back to school—twelve plays off this week and generally dropping receipts. In the last few weeks I bet that not more than six theatres in London have played to good business; and the money lost over Christmas shows is positively awful. I can't see how people are tempted to the game; what with rents and salaries and the rest of it, it's a blank nine times out of ten."

"So it is, and not only in London," said a new arrival fresh from the provinces whom we greeted with "Halloa!" and "Welcome!" "I have just finished a sixteen weeks' tour with my wife"—a famous actress. "It was a great success at the beginning; topping receipts, and, of course, great enthusiasm. We rubbed our hands in glee. Then all of a sudden that General Election! Flop went the box-office! Every week since a loss. Net result £100 to the good, and that was luck. I've done with it; no more management for me; I prefer to take a salary and let the other fellow pay the piper. Whatever happens, the

theatre is always the scapegoat. Whether the country has good luck or bad, the theatre generally gets the kicks when other enterprises get the ha'pence." Somebody interposed—"But remember 1919–1920."

"Yes, that was an exception—after-war exultation. These things happen once in a blue moon. And what happened after that upheaval? A slump such as you had never seen before—and it lasted a year!"

"Then what about this autumn—full houses everywhere, successes all along the line?" came from the defence.

"That is simply a fluke and a mystery; nobody can explain it. Perhaps the plays were exceptionally good" (so they were), "and then there was some money about. After July people had finished with the income-tax for six months; London was full of strangers; the weather was good till November; politically, things went fairly smoothly—all these factors help. But that it was merely a flash in the pan is proved by the fact that after the very first speech of Baldwin on the possibility of an election, the blight fell over-night. Only those plays which everybody tells Everyman that he must see were not affected; the rest galloped downward by leaps and bounds. I tell you the theatre is always the victim of whatever happens. Death in the Royal Family—death in the theatre! I remember that in 1910 (that sad year when King Edward died) I had the success of my life. Night after night the 'house full' boards were out. Next day the shutters; after the funeral, emptiness! Not wild horses, nor yet even 'paper,' could drive the people to the theatre. But let us go on and see how the theatre fares on happier occasions. A royal marriage—down go the receipts; a royal visit—down go the receipts; Advent or Christmas—down go the receipts; then a few weeks' respite and prosperity, but the schools reopen—down! It's always down for some

reason or other; it's down in Lent; it's down when the winter is bad; it's down when June flames more than usual; it's down when the summer is long; it's down when the summer is uncertain—for the people stay away on spec. It's down when there are races on; it's always down—down—down! Will somebody contradict me—will somebody bring forth a few arguments for the other side? Tell me whether it is the same in other countries." And somebody did exclaim: "On the Continent they are wise, and shut the principal theatres in the summer."

"Good for you!" said the croaker; "but do they pay rents of £250 to £450 per week?" How can we afford to shut up when we have to pay these sums, or to interrupt a run when we begin well? There is no room for comparison or for theory: practice tells, and under our system we must either carry on or go under. It is a rotten game, I tell you, and there is no remedy. I once offered 70 per cent. at Lloyd's to insure the risk of a run. They laughed at me. Some of the underwriters have had their fingers in the theatrical pie and burnt them. They knew! They knew! as the old uncle said in Milne's 'Wurzel-Flummery.'"

Suddenly the clouds outside began to lift and a faint little sun tried to burst through the gloom. At that moment one who hitherto had been silent piped up. The Carrier-pigeon v. the Raven.

"Practice," he said; "it is your practice that is wrong. You talk about the theatre and rents, and not one of you bears in mind that we over here do not make a real effort to make our theatres pay, to draw the public by all means at our command. Does a City man or a shopkeeper open his business merely three hours a day and let the rest of it run to waste? Why should a theatre not be open the best part of the twenty-four? I don't say that we are ripe for forenoon performances—that may come in time—but

there is no reason why we should not have daily matinées, as at the Coliseum and Hippodrome. They attract, don't they? It is not my intention to run my evening play twelve times a week, but I will certainly give four matinées, beyond the regulation ones, of another play performed by a different team of actors. That is the game to play, and it's worth the candle. And I am not sure," he added, " that there would not be a public for a cocktail performance between 5.30 and 7.30, when most people don't know how to kill time except with bridge and jazz. I may try it; at any rate, I am going to exploit my theatre on borrowers' lines. I will let it, as it were, work off its rents. That's the way, and better than all this croaking, which is as old as the hills, yet lets things ramble on their conservative course."

XLVI

February 2nd, 1924.

MANAGERS AND CRITICS

Mr. Arthur Hornblow is an Englishman who has made good in America. He is the most urbane and fairest of critics. Under his editorship, the *Theatre Magazine*, the like of which in size and execution does not exist here, has become influential in American stage-land. His articles, "Mr. Hornblow goes to the Play," are both informing and readable. Mr. Hornblow goes to the theatre with an open mind, in great spirits, and with a keen eye for what is "great and good and beautiful." He is never exuberant, albeit he is an enthusiast; he would prefer to be lavish in praise to being devastating in censure. But he, like every critic who holds his office in honour, is an enemy to all that is meretricious and, as he puts it himself, lacks "snap, beauty, and interest." He said something to this effect about the new "Follies" produced by Mr. Flo Ziegfeld. He was not the only one, it appears, who criticised the show adversely; but, as a monthly paper is a lesser tower of thought compared with the omnipotent dailies and weeklies of New York, he was singled out for chastisement and ostracism. The declaration of War was first delivered by a telegram which read as follows—

"*Theatre Magazine*, New York.—Accept sincere appreciation and thanks for wonderful notice your critic wrote about Follies. It was a classic. Everything he praised

the audience's verdict cut out. All he condemned they approved.—ZIEGFELD."

By an irony of fate at about the same time he received another wire, on behalf of the United Theatre Managers of Chicago, with the best of good wishes for his "important publication" in the New Year; and he observed that, in spite of Mr. Ziegfeld's protest, the Follies were shorn of all that he himself had condemned, while the features he praised were retained.

Well, Mr. Hornblow here thought that this endorsement of his criticism would have ended the matter, and that Mr. Ziegfeld had drained his wrath in his somewhat sarcastic telegram. But no. A Press representative was sent to Mr. Hornblow on behalf of Mr. Ziegfeld, and this was his message: "that he (Mr. Hornblow) is no longer *persona grata* in the theatres controlled by Mr. Ziegfeld." He thinks that the whole procedure throws a strange light on the position of the critic, and wonders how a similar case would be handled in London—if there was a precedent for it. Of course there are precedents. There is the famous incident at the Garrick Theatre of years ago, when the critic of the *Times* was refused admission at a *première* on his ticket because, by his former criticism, he was held to be biassed; there is the incident of a telephone reply to a weekly paper inquiring why no tickets were forthcoming: "If you intend sending Mr. X. there is no ticket"; there is the incident of a critic being dismissed on the complaint that he had criticised a leading lady unfairly; there is the incident of a manager asking for a critical head on a charger and obtaining it; and there are a multitude of incidents which occurred *sub rosa* and were buried quietly because at the crucial moment some wise friend of the warrior parties stepped in and acted as the angel of peace.

But there is a great difference between the case of Mr. Hornblow and similar conflicts in London. Mr. Hornblow as editor is a master, and as such he is beholden to no one. He may risk a possible affront when presenting himself with a purchased ticket, but even if he were barred he would find ways and means to see the performance, and record his opinion. In London a critic ostracised by a manager, unless he belonged to a paper that would stand by him, would be in a very awkward position. His fate might depend on the question whether the goodwill—which includes advertisements—of a manager is not of greater moment than the value of the critic. He would tremble in his shoes; he might lose his job; he could not, as recently in Paris, hope for the *esprit de corps* of his colleagues, backed by their newspaper-proprietors, whereby the ostracising manager would be ostracised in his turn by the non-appearance of any notice in criticism of his show until there had been amends. Thanks to the efforts of the Critics' Circle, there is a possibility that henceforth conflicts between critics and criticised may be settled by arbitration—the Managers' Association and the Circle—each naming their spokesman with right to examine the parties. But the idea is still in the air, and, perhaps fortunately, there has been no cause so far to test its practicality. Meanwhile, Mr. Hornblow may be commended for taking the right course, although I am not sure that, if the "bar sinister" were pronounced, a critic could get into the theatre even if he presented a paid-for ticket. There is a certain case connected with the Palace Theatre which renders it at least dubious whether a purchased ticket means a contract on the part of a manager to admit; and (significant fact) on some programmes there is a note that the management reserves to itself the right of admission. Recalling this while discussing the Hornblow incident among colleagues,

one said waggishly—"I bet that they will never keep me out—did not Clement Scott go to the pit-queue when Wyndham once declared him to be no longer *persona grata?* And if it came to the worst there is always Willie Clarkson, who changes men by the magic of his wigs!"

XLVII

February 9th, 1924.

REPERTORY: THE THIN END

Alas, poor Birmingham! What a loss, what a void, this sad and sudden departure of the Repertory Theatre in the hey-day of its glory! There is but one consolation to be proffered to the forsaken city, and it is this: if the Birmingham Theatre had a short life, it was a merry one, and one worth living, with a grand finale that will live in the history of our drama as, perhaps, the most notable feature in the first quarter of this century. The production of "Back to Methuselah" has made Birmingham famous all the world over beyond the lustre of its industry. In Continental papers I have seen Birmingham praised as an English Beyreuth—well deserved was that homage. For while London let Shaw's great work slumber between covers, Birmingham, at the ensign of Barry Jackson, was put to the test and stood it splendidly. For five days it went steadfastly to the theatre to see the quintology, and thus it cast into the shade London's feat of pre-war days when it worshipped at Wagner's shrine in continuous devotion to the "Ring."

What Birmingham will do now is on the knees of the gods; perhaps one of Barry Jackson's young men will press on where the leader left off; perhaps the City Fathers will cast their eyes on the fine example of Bristol, acquire the little theatre, and lend it rent free to him who is willing to take up Jackson's succession. Much may be expected from Birmingham, which has ever bid for a foremost place in

the world of art, and, especially in the cult of music, has proved a rival to the Metropolis.

Meanwhile the Birmingham Repertory Theatre will be re-christened, with "London" as prefix; the Court Theatre will be its home; and those who love the drama foster hopes that their day-dreams will materialise in the permanent establishment of Repertory. It would be premature to speculate as to Mr. Barry Jackson's policy, although his record, culminating in "The Immortal Hour" and "Back to Methuselah," is of happy augury. There will be open-sesame for new thoughts and new forms, and the beginning with "Back to Methuselah" will be a direct challenge to our public. If Shaw's play draw sufficient numbers to create an even balance—one does not like to say "make it pay" where a purely artistic enterprise is concerned—the answer will be given in the affirmative to the perennial question: "Does London really want a Repertory Theatre?" It has been tried often and failed; not exactly because the public held aloof—there were not sufficient resources to continue the work. There is no fear of that under Mr. Barry Jackson's leadership. He has the ships, he has the men, he has the money too. Others had the former two, but not the latter. And, as in the case of matrimony, a happy existence of a Repertory Theatre is largely a matter of money.

This brings me to a very important point to be settled at the outset—namely, the prices of admission. Those who really love and support the theatre in London are people ready to spend, but of small purses. Twelve-shilling stalls and half-guinea dress circles are beyond their means, and many stand aloof because the cheaper seats are both uncomfortable and laborious to obtain. If Mr. Barry Jackson wishes the Repertory Theatre to stand on its own legs after the preliminary outlay for his first

productions, he would be well advised to lower the standard prices and to let all seats be booked; if he were to charge seven shillings and sixpence for stalls and six shillings for the dress-circle, he could count on the support of the middle purses, to which at present a theatre evening means, all told, a "mint" of money; and if he would allow the patrons of pit and gallery to book, he would prove a real friend to the thousand of workers who cannot, by the hours of their employment, afford the time to wait in queues or to pay messenger-boys as *locum tenentes*.

As one who has some experience—dearly bought—of Repertory in London, I can assure Mr. Jackson that the prices of admission are the thin end of the wedge, for artistically his success is secured. Once it is known that the best plays and the best acting can be seen by Everyman of Everyman's price: "House Full" will be the order of the day. For then the Court Theatre will be to the West what the Old Vic is across the water: the People's Theatre, thriving by the people's patronage.

P.S.—Birmingham has seen the error of its ways. £3,000 have been proffered to Mr. Jackson as a guaranty for next season. London subscribed exactly the same number of pence towards the "People's Theatre" in Whitechapel. R.I.P. (the P.T., not London!).

XLVIII

February 16th, 1924.

THE MAN AT THE HELM

The appointment of young Basil Dean to the director-ship of Drury Lane in succession to Mr. Arthur Collins—who has deserved well of the institution and the public by his understanding, his energy, his wide vista, his mastery of technique—is not merely a compliment to the partner of the firm of Reandean, but a recognition of the producer. For there is no secret that Basil Dean, starting at the Reper-tory Theatre of Liverpool, has made his name, and "Hassan" is there for all the world to appreciate his eye for colour, for ensemble, for all the Orient means in skies and architecture and raiment of the people. Before that he gave us "East of Suez," and made it manifest to the public at large that a new man had come to Court.

It is only latterly that the public has begun to grasp the real importance of the producer. His ascent dates from the days of Granville Barker. Until then his work was often praised, but the man remained in the background as far as the world was concerned. People spoke of Tree or Irving's great productions, without exactly knowing what "pro-duction" meant. They looked at the work as one looks at a wonderful machine. The effect interested them, but they rarely penetrated into the creation of it. They grasped the aspect, but not the soul. Unless he were a well-known actor-manager, the producer remained unnamed even in criticism. His significance was not greater than that of the drill sergeant—the man who moulds the unit and makes it

it into the great whole. There are still many who look upon the producer as one who composes the pictures and selects the "props." They do not realise that he is, next to the author, the most important man in the theatre; that without him the actors are like a ship without a pilot; that a great deal of the success of the piece depends not only on his vision but on his assimilation of the whole of the play inwardly as well as outwardly, as an entity as well as in its various characters. Great producers are born, and shaped by experience and knowledge; you cannot make a great producer, as you cannot make a great actor. His brain must be a lens as well as a projector. When he reads the manuscript the play must become vitalised in his mind; he must see it; he must sense it; he must hear it. If you look at the annotated copy of a producer—the very name conjures up seed that germinates into fruit—you will find that to learn a play is, in aspect, something like a game of jig-saw. He dissects the dialogue; he breaks it up into fragments; he plans positions; he devises movements to avoid monotony; he fixes with mathematical accuracy the strategical development of the action—if I may call it so—whereby the climax reaches its full height. He knows when and how to drop the curtain—and how much depends on that! He is, in fact, the master-builder as well as the architect. Unwittingly, perhaps, he calculates as minutely as the man who builds a theatre cantilevers his galleries. Only there is this difference: the builder in stone and concrete has certain laws at hand to ease his task; the producer has to construct by intuition. His material is uncertain, for no one can gauge exactly how the written word will tell when spoken, as no one can depend entirely on its conveyance by the actor.

For this reason the producer must be endowed with a greater gift than technique in every sense of the word.

He must fathom the meaning of the author in every line—in some cases, in every word. Plainly he must find in himself the realisation of every character—he must see them dressed up; he must hear them speak as the author would have them utter his words; he must in the text find the soul and correlation to the action of every part, from the hero to the butler. And it is here that his task becomes particularly difficult. "Actors are sensitive people," wrote a great German producer; if he approaches his actors in the spirit of the schoolmaster, he spoils the play." Actors—unless they are cowed by fear of losing their job—are wont to have their own opinions and conception of their parts; if these tally with those of the producer, all is well. But often there is difference of opinion, and then it behoves the producer—who has absorbed the whole of the play, whereas the interpreter naturally dwells mainly on his part—to display tact in carrying through his definite policy. He must, in fact, command the diplomacy of a musical conductor, whose business it is to obtain harmony of conception by impressing his reading on the whole of the orchestra. If he is a wise man—says my producer mentioned above—he will not interfere with the first fiddle; he will convert him to his own conception by the swing of his baton.

It is an exceedingly ticklish question, and one that accounts for more ructions in the theatre than any outsider can imagine. But the producer who is really a manager of men will get his way by tempering the firmness with discretion. If he is wise he will never interfere during the rehearsal—unless an error is flagrant—he will quietly take his actor into a corner and suavely, persuasively, try to convince him of the author's meaning and his own. Even the most sensitive actors are amenable to change of views if approached tactfully. Producers who do not understand that part of the game will never achieve their end. On the other

hand, it occurs that a producer feels in the course of his work that he has to shift his beacons; that the actor gives a reading which does not tally with his own, but which *viva voce* proves to be more effective. It is then his business to capitulate with grace; not to pursue his policy, as we know some American producers have done, when shaping an American play for the English stage, without understanding the *naturel* of the nation.

What, then, is expected of a producer of eminence is almost the dower of a super-man. He must have imagination (Chapter One); he must have an almost unlimited knowledge of atmospheres, nations, characteristics of places and of people, of manners and of customs, of mentalities and psychology. He must have the power of absorption. He must know the value of the words; he must hear how they should be spoken; he must realise how they affect the action. Last but not least, he must have before him in every act, in every scene, a complete vision of a harmonious living picture in which different people of different temperaments are symphonically blended. In fine, in his mind must be crystallised the talents of the draughtsman, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the poet. And, above all, he must be human; for his achievement depends on the understanding of the motley crowd we call humanity —that indefinable entity which is so varied in its elements, so elementary in its unity of feelings.

XLIX

February 23rd, 1924.

THE DRAWING-ROOM THEATRE

Hope springs eternal! In a dream there came to me a fairy "full of beans." She had a wonderful idea, she said, and she felt sure that, if realised, it would render immense service to the drama as well as to the actors; that it would pay its way and become a London topic.

"Is it quite original?" I asked. Whereupon there was a little "hm" and a "ha" and the not unwonted feminine doubt whether I ought to ask questions. But with a little pressure she said that it was going to be tried—somewhere in America; but, like Nora Bayes, she would not say when, nor would she say how. At any rate, for London she had evolved a scheme all out of her own head, and she wanted someone to help her to set the ball rolling. And as her eyes—pretty eyes—were glowing with enthusiasm, and I look upon it as the priceless gift of youth —and all agree—I was won over. "Fire away," said I; "tell me all about it and I will see how far I can give a little aid if it promises to be helpful to the Cause."

Then with great glee she exclaimed: "It is a Drawing-Room Theatre, a *théâtre d'élite*, such as the Capucines began in Paris, only much smaller in size and in number of patrons. I want," she went on in vertiginous fluency, "the loan of a big drawing-room in one of the large London Mansions; preferably in the house of a leader of society who loves the theatre and has literary tastes. When I have found my 'theatre,' I shall want a hundred people

to subscribe five guineas each for six performances, and each of my hundred shall be allowed to bring one guest. Two hundred will be the extreme limit of the audience; and, except the Press, there will be no chance of admission for either love or money. When I have captured my subscribers it will be easy to recruit my actors: ask the Stage Society, Phœnix, Play Actors, Repertory Theatre Players and the rest of the Sunday societies, how many artists are clamouring at their gates for a chance, and *pro deo*, save a guinea or two for expenses. I feel sure that when I send my recruiting appeal to the Press, the supply will overwhelm the demand tenfold."

"And who is going to produce?"

"I," said she. "I am a cosmopolitan, and I know my business. I have been connected with a leading London theatre; I have studied on the stages of Paris and Berlin; I have it at my fingers' ends. Producing is as peculiar a gift as acting; you must learn the rudiments—the rest is instinct. Producers are born, not made."

"The plays . . .?"

"Now, really," she laughed at me in her charming youthful impertinence, "ought you, a critic of I don't know how many years experience, to ask me such a silly question? Plays! Don't you know that there is a library full of printed plays worth doing, and that the cry is, still they come, unto the desk and the reviewers' knowledge, but rarely to the stage? What about all the little works of Housman, the plays of Rubenstein, Lawrence, the plays of"—I stemmed the tide with a "Yes, yes," but as she still wedged in names and titles, I felt that, at any rate in that respect, there would be no crying in the wilderness.

"Are foreign plays also to be considered?"

"Of course," she said; "there are many foreign works that will never be heard in England, as they deserve to

be, if somebody does not take them in hand regardless of the commercial aspect. Is it not a shame that 'Porto-Riche' has never once been translated; that since the Stage Society did the 'Nouvelle Idole' of François de Curel this greatest dramatist of France has remained totally ignored over here? Is it not a shame that we never see a Danish or Swedish or Norwegian play (except Ibsen or Björnsen); that of Holland we know only Heyermans, and of the Flemish nothing at all; and that as far as Italy is concerned we have swaggered ever so long with the one belated discovery of Pirandello's 'Six Characters,' which, goodness knows why, has been banned by the Censor; that of Spain we did a Benavente play—badly; that of Slovakia, Serbia——?"

"I know, I know," I sighed, and felt like the judge who soothed the irate lawyer's protest against a witness's volubility: "You dam the current but you cannot stem it." "The evidence is overwhelming, the plays are there; you have proved it with a vengeance. Now a practical question —what about stage and scenery?"

"The stage, that is simple enough—a fit-up podium is all I want; but the scenery, that is a moot point. Generally, I can do all I want in curtains: for people of imagination, curtains make the picture. Don't you remember that in your French Theatre, during the war, your most effective scene was the palatial room in 'La Caresse du Saint Sacrement,' by Prosper Merimée—nothing but impressively draped curtains and a few paraphernalia styled Louis XV? And then there is, of course, Hasait, which Basil Dean uses so well on the grand scale. I understand that Hasait, the inventor, is perfecting a lantern so compact and easily portable, that in a short time it will be practicable to use it on the smallest possible space, and that the expense will be very small. As for props, I can

borrow them; I know I can: the big emporia will only be too glad to lend me all I want for an advertisement on the programme."

"You blessed optimist!" I said; "however, I will not damp your ardour." (For I was impressed by her methodical marshalling of facts.) "But now, suppose all that comes into being, in what manner would your Drawing-Room Theatre help on drama beyond enlightening your two hundred?"

"On that point," said the valiant little promoter, "I have no doubts. Murder will out—so will good things. If my patrons and the Press are pleased by some of the productions, they are sure to find their way to the regular boards. For of one thing I am sure: if the plan materialises at all, I shall get some managers or their representatives in my fold. They want the plays—we may be able to find them."

And then she quoted most aptly how "At Mrs. Beam's" and "Outward Bound" were discovered at Everyman Theatre, and "Between Four Walls," and latterly "Havoc," at Sunday performances.

"But why a Drawing-Room Theatre?" I asked. "Why not a larger scale, a new club—or something of the sort?"

"The answer is, diplomacy and finance. If you tell the public, even the intelligentsia, that they can become members for a couple of guineas, you must launch out expensively, take a theatre, spend at least one hundred and fifty to two hundred on a performance, and you are not at all sure that you get the right sort of public. If, however, you announce that the affair is select; that no more than a hundred can get in; that with five hundred pounds you will achieve what otherwise costs double and more, and that by their help and advocacy great service can be rendered to the drama, I feel sure that there will

be response. Young as I am I know the world. To be exclusive is to be fashionable. The less you let in, the greater the welcome made for you by those that remain outside."

"Well, at any rate," I said, "you are a capital Portia, and I would lend you a hand if I could. I will devote my page in the *Illustrated London News* to your dream of a little enchanted island in the World of the Theatre, and if my readers ask who is this latest champion of the drama I shall inform them of your identity and where you are to be found. Meanwhile, remember what stuff dreams are made of; don't wonder if you remain *in nubibus*... But go on and prosper! Enthusiasm deafens the ear as it purblinds the eye. Still, who knows?" Then I woke up!

L

March 1st, 1924.

REPERTORY TO THE RESCUE

Mr. William Lugg, of the Actors' Association, ever on the alert to be of service to the profession, has hit upon a new plan to deal with the vexed question of the unemployed. He proposes that, in the big provincial cities, repertory companies should be formed and that the actors should be engaged for a certain number of months at a living wage, based, no doubt, on the Valentine Contract. He thinks that a great many people would be interested in the revival of plays which at one time or other have been a success, if they were produced adequately. Also, since so many London productions are successfully tried in the provinces, there is reason to believe that new plays would attract the crowd.

The proposition has certainly a *raison d'être*, but, like many other enterprises that would promise well if realised, the main issue depends on finance. How is the money to be found? That is the question. It might be raised by a public subscription of shares, if a man of influence, say Sir Oswald Stoll, were to take the lead. He could easily secure a nucleus of provincial theatres and rule their administration from a central office. Another way to establish a sound foundation would be an appeal to the Rotary Club branches in the large centres, and to obtain local guarantors and the co-operation of municipal councils. It has succeeded in Bristol, and if the first campaign in that city proves that with a little "first aid" the institution

can live, and anon make the two ends meet, there is reason to believe that other cities will follow suit.

But—a big "but"—there is the experience of Mr. Barry Jackson at Birmingham. At first we hoped that his coming to the court in London was merely an extension of his activities. Now, after much praise showered upon Birmingham for the seeming patronage of its Repertory Theatre, we learn that chagrin with the removal was a severance. Mr. Jackson had closed his theatre because it was a losing game; because the patronage was generally insufficient, and he for one would not begin again unless he was assured that at least two-thirds of the capacity of the theatre were subscribed for beforehand. This short summary of facts sets one thinking and creates ominous doubts. If the Repertory Theatre of Birmingham, with its attractive programme, including many new plays, could only exist by bounties of its Director, what are the chances in other cities of a theatre mainly to be engaged in revivals of old favourites? It would be interesting to learn from Mr. Lugg how his proposal is received in the theatrical world, but I fear that unless Maecenas came to the rescue there would be little enthusiasm, since the outlook is hazy, to say the least of it.

Meanwhile, the profession owes a debt of gratitude to Mr. Lugg, in that he has broken with the masterly inactivity which has prevailed for years. If he could only find enough support to start, the ball might continue rolling. But do not let him build his hopes on the actors. *Esprit de corps* exists, perhaps, among the rank and file, but among the leaders there is so much worry to cope with expenditure and risk that one can hardly blame them for a policy mainly tending towards self-preservation. And so far as Repertory to the Rescue is concerned, we live in hope and—tribulation.

LI

March 8th, 1924.

ABOUT SHAW'S "BACK TO METHUSELAH"

HAVING swallowed, but not digested—I shall never achieve that—this quaint quintology, I must make a confession. If I had to criticise it, I would find myself ere long in a sanatorium. It defies criticism; it defies analysis. For it is not a play, but a series of palavers, sometimes witty to the degree of impudence, often perplexing by length and such profusion of verbiage that no normal mind can take it in, follow its maze of ramification and discussions, and realise by *tour de force* what is the meaning of this endless satire of life and longevity. And in making this confession, after hours of listening and hours of trying to steady the gyration of conflicting thoughts in my little head, I have come to a conclusion.

This play is a magnificent jest—the greatest literary jest ever attempted by a great man, who, conscious that he could do with his public as he pleases, pulled it by the leg and—pulled both off, jest as well as leg.

A Dutch writer of rare originality, and ideas which vibrated his nation to the marrow by their frankness and disdain of all accepted canons, Multatuli—a "G.B.S." of the Netherlands—once proclaimed, "Public, I contemn you!" What he meant was that a super-mind can defy the masses, play havoc with all convention, can say what he likes and enforce his views by the sheer power of his outspokenness and disregard of that which is generally accepted as standard value.

Shaw, with his tongue in his cheek and cheek on his tongue, knows that by this time his words are received by the public like the heavenly manna for which Eve in Part I. is praying. He is acknowledged by some as the greatest mind of our time, by all as one of them; he may not always be taken seriously, but he cannot be ignored, must be listened to. His audacity knows neither rank nor bound, and as the tilting at the powers that be, spiritual or real, ever amuses the multitude, the harder he hits the more surely he gets home. Life is a tragic-comic problem to him, whether it be life in the Garden of Eden or in a political Cabinet—canons, conventions, creeds—all a tragic-comedy. And the most tragic part of the comedy is the public—the flock of sheep that will follow any shepherd if he possesses the secret of leadership.

So Shaw, once and for all to prove his domination, set to work with that boundless knowledge, originality and flow of language all his own—language of imagery, language of science and philosophy, language of satire, wit, buffoonery—to fling the whole business of life from creation to centuries of the future into the melting-pot. What Wagner did in earnest, he would do in jest. First he arrested world-wide attention by publishing his *jeu d'esprit* in book-form. Next he succeeded, as he knew he would, in tempting a manager to regard the production of the play—and actors to memorise his avalanches.

Birmingham for five days became Bayreuth. And both he and his acolyte, Mr. Barry Jackson, may have known full well that all who went to Birmingham would go back to London in the spirit of the little boy when the showman showed a fake-fish for a penny and made him say that he had seen a monster!—*mundus vult decipi*, and deceive the others!

So the cycle came to London, and straight away no

fewer than a thousand people subscribed in the aggregate for five thousand evenings at the theatre. Was ever the impelling power of one man more triumphantly demonstrated? Five evenings of our lives given to conversaziones, abstract, abstruse, absurd, with nuggets of gold in masses of rock—what a devilishly clever achievement; what sublime mockery of the public; what fun to herd us all into the theatre, to coerce us, to listen, patiently, silently, reverently or irreverently (according to the nature of the dialogue); to profess understanding; to savour with the highbrows; to wipe away shamefacedly a yawn and yawns; to acclaim the actors; to enthuse, to make-believe great interest and pleasure—to confess to oneself deep down, silently, "He has taken me in—but for heaven's sake let the world not see it—let's make *bonne mine à mauvais jeu*"!

And we cannot be angry with Shaw. We admire him for coercing us. Once more he has proved that he is a superman—that he is a ruler—that we are but his obedient lieges. I shudder to think what the world would have said if anyone but Shaw had served us with "Back to Methuselah"! But the flag covers the cargo. Breaking the chains of convention, Shaw's galleon has, in the wake of Admiral de Ruyter, sailed up the waters of the Thames gaily, doughtily, defiantly, and—he who laughs last, laughs best.

LII

March 15th, 1924.

VILLAGE PLAYERS—CHAPLIN AS FILM-PRODUCER

Mr. Will Meade, the Penshurst Saddler, is likely to make history. He has discovered, perhaps in the wake of Thomas Hardy's Dorset Players, that the dead winter evenings are not filled by the inn, the brass band, and the occasional ballad-concerts by the local choir. If there are good singers around, why not seek players, and, in a way, get up a kind of Village Repertory Theatre? So, as we have all read, he wrote a play entirely his own, picked the likeliest among his friends, and took them in hand, and gave a performance which was so good that even professional critics spoke of it in genuine praise.

He now wants to continue the spade-work, and to see it pursued in every village where there is a fair-sized hall, adaptable to a stage, and a man ready to select the plays and the actors; or, if there is no villager to be found to undertake the production, he hopes that some regular actor of the London stage will come forward to execute the task. That the latter idea is likely to fall on fertile ground is proved by the experiments at Shepperton-on-Thames, where, under the guidance of Mr. Malcolm Morley, the actor-critic, a series of revivals of modern plays is in active preparation, with the whole community watching coming events with great interest.

Mr. Meade has confided to an interviewer that the ideal plan would be for the villagers to write their own

plays, and thereby create a kind of folklore; but that may be a dream the realisation of which rests on the knees of the gods. Not every village possesses an artisan endowed with the gift of the artist. But his next ideal is more easily fulfilled. He suggests that the authorities of villages where there is a public library should vote a little sum for the establishment of a play-department—especially of plays of small compass demanding but a small cast and little scenery. For he contends that, at any rate at the beginning, very simple plays should be given, so that regularity of rehearsals could be ensured and the production would not become so complicated. He also advises that, in preference, no plays of the Mayfair-Society type be chosen, lest the villagers should fall short of the embodiment of characters foreign to their nature and their walk of life.

Withal it is an excellent idea, and one that will commend itself to all who are interested in village life, from the Squire and the parson to the labourer who feels the flame of Hephaestos smouldering in his bosom. In France and in Germany—think of Oberammergau—the village play is a time-honoured institution, and latterly the movement has spread to Switzerland. On summer days there are given fairy plays, as well as classics in open-air theatres on the banks of the lakes; and some of these performances are so attractive that the visitors flock to them from neighbouring cantons and help to make the experiment a financial as well as an artistic success.

There is no reason why the good example set by Mr. Will Meade should not be eagerly followed. Surely there is as much histrionic talent among the rural population as among the Society amateurs in the great cities. And the very thought that now and then a play will banish the deadly dulness of the winter evenings, and enliven small communities by the feverish activity of rehearsals and all

that a "show" means, should stimulate the new movement throughout the counties of the land.

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Whatever may be said of the story of "A Woman of Paris," Charles Chaplin's new film at the Tivoli—and opinions differ considerably—as a production it has great merits. For one thing, Chaplin's principle seems to be: let the pictures tell their own tale. Away with tiresome "captions" (formerly called sub-titles), their lengthy information (often in doubtful grammar), their attempts at jokes, and their usurpation of the plan of action. So easily is the story told in direct narrative that here and there a few words suffice to establish the missing links. At one point, when the lover meets his long-lost Marie, now a radiant figure in the easiest of Paris, the one word "Well!" thrice repeated, graphically condenses what is going on in both his and his mother's souls. Their facial expressions tell the rest—astonishment, wonder, doubt.

And over and over again we meet this terseness of argument, which kindles our interest instead of wearying it, as under the old system. Another quality is the minute accuracy with which Chaplin, in Los Angeles, has not only constructed the Paris *milieu* of restaurant life and dancing cabarets, but selected his types, so that we see the real people—the *rastas* as well as the *cocottes*, the *cuisiniers* as well as the *maître d'hôtel*. Within an ace the traveller who knows his Paris of pleasure would mistake the interpreters for the good Samaritans he is wont to address with a freedom of an habitué by their Christian names. The whole surroundings have a familiar touch—they scent of Paris.

The Chaplin fantasy and humour, too, come out at every point. When Marie leaves her home, and at the station, after waiting in vain for her lover, takes the train

to Paris, there is no actual train in sight: a shadow passes by the station-windows—it *is* the train rushing in, in the morning haze, and the illusion is daring yet complete. Such is Chaplin's fantasy: and then a touch of humour, one of many. Marie, now richly installed by a beau of fortune, would give up this life of bondage and marry her young lover. She sighs for home, husband, children. Then the rich man opens the window and shows her domestic bliss—a woman crossing the road with three crying, wrangling children whom she pulls by the limbs and hair—domestic bliss! What a farce!

There is a pathos too: in Marie and her young lover's mother—the Magdalen and the Saint—uniting hands over the dead body of the boy who has shot himself in the madness of love and jealousy; and in the finish, when these two women devote their lives to the welfare of little children—the mother to seek solace, the ex-courtesan to work out expiation. And so the end, if not wholly happy or conclusive, is at least consoling.

Needless to say under the eye of a master the photography is perfect and the effects of light and shade admirable. The chief characters are all portrayed with great skill. Miss Purviance as Marie has all the luxurious allures of the great *demi-mondaine*, yet now and again the real woman comes out in tenderness and natural charm. Adolphe Menjou is the perfect type of the *homme à femmes*, elegant, hard, sardonic, correct to a fault, yet *au fond* a heartless creature who knows how to buy love and to pay for it.

I wonder where Chaplin found his story. Here and there one recalls pages of Alphonse Daudet's "Jack." It is a strange mixture of realism and facile romance, but it holds the onlooker because it is dramatically told, and not merely Parisian in name.

LIII

March 22nd, 1924.

HAPPY ENDINGS

Playwrights who write serious dramas will tell you that very often the dread "rat-tat" of the postman which means "declined with thanks" is due to the absence of a "happy ending." The market for plays which end "fatality" or on a query is very limited: only dramatists with a name have a chance of acceptance; only actors sure of their public may venture the costly experiment of trying a play with a finale which is death or parting. Our public, very sentimental and romantic *au fond*, do not like a gloomy ending, we are told. They want to go home with the comfortable feeling that the final curtain means at least assumed happiness ever after. It may be entirely illogical; it may be obviously false; it may be a flagrant contradiction to the nature of the conflict or the character—never mind: so long as there is an embrace, an extended hand, a reconciliation of a kind, they go hence in contentment. The other solution—the true one, the often disagreeable one—may mean not only a death-knell on the stage, but one that forebodes the speedy demise of the play. It is idle to argue about it, for there it is. You cannot alter the nature of a public unless you have the means to preserve and to force them to accept the issue. Even old Rome apparently did not like to leave the playhouse with a sob. After tragedy came a short farce, so history tells us, to drown the tears in laughter.

For all that, the compelled happy ending is, to those

who look upon the theatre as something higher than a mere vehicle for facile amusement, a thorn in the flesh. It spoils their pleasure as much as the others are disturbed by the contrary. Nor is the happy ending a saving clause from the box-office point of view. When one of Pinero's best of the earlier plays—"The Profligate"—showed, despite a great artistic success, meagre returns, the author for once allowed a change—let his hero live instead of die. The result was negative. Neither party was satisfied; the run was, for a Pinero play, a short one; and when it was occasionally revived on tour or by Repertory Theatres the real ending had to be reinstated. For the happy curtain was incongruous, and, as it were, cut the backbone out of the play. Brieux had a similar experience. His first play was a great success at the Théâtre Libre, and the end, in which the heroine, an underpaid schoolmistress, left her unhappy home to seek the easiest way, was acclaimed as a fitting climax—the one possible solution. When 'Blanchette" was transferred to the regular stage it did well for a time, when realism was the order of the day. As soon, however, as reaction set in, the receipts began to drop, and Brieux, to save the situation, manufactured a happy finale, which lowered the standard and weakened the play. Reality came into conflict with the assumed way out. I could quote many such cases in which art was sacrificed for the sake of economics, but I cannot recall an instance of a play being saved by the process. Apparently the public does not take kindly to such conversions. Still, the preference for happiness remains remarkable. Time after time the curtain falls on thunders of applause, when a moment's reflection would show how absurd, how false, how dragged-in-by-the-hair, is that would-be happiness.

Take the latest play of Clemence Dane, "The Way

Things Happen." All through the piece the heroine has been neglected and belittled by the hero. There is no vestige of love for her during the whole action until, by will of the authoress, not by logical evolution, he is driven into her arms. These two—as we know them—have nothing in common; love is all on the woman's side; they are not made for one another, not fit mates. What happiness can such a union promise? Those who understand life shudder at the thought. Not so the first-nighters. It is nothing but the fatal first-night dope—the opium that beguiles for a while and leads to a rude awakening. When I saw the play, a day or two after the *première*, there was little animation; only such as was deserved by the efforts of the actors. The comments around me and on the way out were significant: that audience did not believe in the happy ending any more than I did.

It is a fallacy to believe that unreal happiness makes success. It depends on the problem set before us; it depends on the way the play is constructed; it depends on the feelings of the audience produced by the crucial scene —the scene on which the solution hangs. There will always be a few in the stalls as well as in the gallery who become emotional over a long embrace; but the majority is not to be bamboozled by a final "cheerio!" at any price. They may not betoken it at the first performance; they may even clap their hands and shout—because the actors, not the author, deserve it. But then lip-to-lip criticism, the secret power that makes or mars plays, as the audience disperses towards the four quarters of the town, will soon tell a different tale. And no happy ending in the world can alter its course.

LIV

March 29th, 1924.

TO CRITICISE OR NOT TO CRITICISE

THERE is a story of a dramatic critic who in his study had a cupboard containing three suits—an evening dress, a jacket suit, and pyjamas; and when he sat down to criticise, he donned one of the three, according to the nature of the play he had to deal with. Needless to say, he was the critic of a weekly, for the printer's devil would have left him no time for such masquerades had he worked for a daily paper.

When he had to criticise a classic, a poetic play, a serious drama, he put on his war-paint; when he sat in judgment on melodrama, comedy, or any sort of play of lesser importance, on went the jacket-suit; and when farce—with or without bedroom scenes—musical comedy, and every kind of thing *pour passer le temps* had to be polished off lightly, airily, with a little contempt for his subject, he slipped into his pyjamas. Thus, he said, he found the right mood. I do not know that the process is to be recommended for imitation, but, figuratively speaking, there is something to be said for it. I, for one, approach my task always with the same zest, but in different moods. And here I would confess that it costs me more trouble to say something worth recording about plays of no consequence (my colleague's pyjama-plays) than about a work of importance. When I feel that an artist, be he an actor or, say Shakespeare, or a playwright aspiring high, is striving to give his best, I try to attune my mind to his ambition.

These are not occasions to sit down and fling opinion slap-dash on paper; one should enter into the spirit of the work, to realise that it may have cost its creator or re-creator a long span of thought and labour; that judgment is anxiously awaited, and that on this judgment much depends. Appreciation may encourage; depreciation will damp ardour, and thus, perhaps, nip in the bud the promise of greater things to come. How often have we not heard of the actor's and playwright's apprehension as to the verdict of the critic whose word goes forth to a wide circle of readers, and thereby carries weight? What joys have been aroused by the paper on the breakfast-table; what tears have been shed over it! Does the average reader ever pause to reflect what the criticised feels when at a glance he takes in the opinion on his work? It may be but one man's opinion, but it is voiced by a multitude, and it is thus that reputations can be made, thwarted, or destroyed by a few inches of printed matter. It would be a wonderful symposium, and to the readers an eye-opener, to ask those who work for the stage: "What does criticism mean to you?"

It is for this reason that there is a great deal to be said for the evening-dress mood. When we don it in life, we involuntarily change our attitude—the distinction of the clothes reflects on the man, his tenour, his manners. He stands, as it were, away from the common rut. He may not know it, but *noblesse oblige* prevails. There is something solemn and exalting in the swallow-tail and the cambric tie. And I can well realise that my colleague wields his pen with greater distinction when his body is attuned to the loftiness of his task. Yes, I can understand this transformation when in office; it prevails in other professions: the judge in scarlet and the barristers in wig and gown are different beings from the same men

ve meet at the club or in the street. If we critics were to wear togas on a first night, there would be no invitation on the sly by a manager's acolyte to step into a little office and have refreshment. Not that a critic, as Mr. A. E. Baughan so rightly says, would sell his independence for a whisky-and-soda; but the proceeding lacks dignity, and would never be attempted if critics, by their very aspect, were as unapproachable as judge and advocates.

But, *sans blague*, there is something to be said for Mr. Milne's—the distinguished playwright's—attitude of the critic towards serious plays, although he goes too far when he would desire that serious plays should not be criticised at all. If that were the course adopted, the playwright, as well as the manager, would be the main sufferers; for it is an accepted fact that serious plays take, as a rule, far more time to penetrate into public favour than the lighter material that, by laughter or tune, is rapidly popularised by enthusiasts of pit and gallery.

Still, in the main trend of thought, Mr. Milne is right. Serious work is all too often disposed of lightly. Take the case of Mr. Munro's latest work, "Progress"—a work of moment, and one that, if it had been played in any other capital but London, would have been a topic of discussion and polemics. For it touches the marrow of national life; it deals with political aspects paramount in the mind of every newspaper reader. And what has been said of it? Who has heard of it beyond the Sunday and Monday audiences of the Stage Society and the enthusiasts of the drama—ever on the alert? In some quarters "Progress" has been altogether ignored: for there was a railway strike on, and to serve the provinces—so we are told—the papers had to be diminished in size, and matter had to go overboard—dramatic criticism of special performances first of all. In other quarters, the consideration of the play was

not more elaborate and searching than of any work of n consequence. Evidently it was a case for the jacket-sui and not for evening-dress. If Mr. Milne had read it all he would have said : " I told you so " ; and is it not bette to say nothing than to say so little that matters ? An to this, the effective reply would be to shift our beacons and to devote the cream of our thoughts, the utmost c our analytical power, the best of our judgment, to th criticisms of serious work described by Mr. Milne as " play written because the author wants to write it so, an can only write it so." If in this respect the critic woul follow suit, all would be well.

LV

April 5th, 1924.

THE ACTORS' MUSEUM

Has anybody ever thought that the time has now come o found an Actors' Museum—a place where future genera-ions will be able to hear the voices of the foremost actors f to-day? The cinema to a certain extent preserves the nute personality: in years to come the film of "Macbeth" vill convey in some degree what manner of man Herbert Tree was; what facial expressions he commanded; how ie moved and gestured; what were his peculiarities and nannerisms. Of Charles Hawtrey too—to name another lear departed, although he was not a great success on the ilm and rarely his genial, unconscious self—there is a emblance, if not of his genius, of his method. And as ime goes by, and the cinema attracts more and more eading actors, as it undoubtedly will, it would be com-paratively easy to collect in due course a moving picture-gallery for the benefit of posterity. Whether such a collection is in contemplation I do not know. Even America, always in the vanguard of enterprise, has so far given no sign that it has taken time by the forelock. But somewhere, I think it was in Germany, the subject has been discussed, and, if so far it has not materialised, the reason is evidently the economic question. State and municipalities are eager enough to take up new ideas, but he present financial standard hardly allows subsidies to he theatre, let alone to a project which would more directly benefit the future than the present day.

Besides, the picture means but half the battle; it the voice that conveys the power of the actor and embodie the soul and emotion of the interpreter. By their delivery by their diction, they shall be judged. And it is her that I always remain unsatisfied when I read in books c memoirs long contemplations of the best of actors of th past whom the writers, no more than you or I, have eve seen or heard, and whom they extol by hearsay of friend of their childhood or by criticisms which at best are bu one man's impression.

So long as there was no mechanical way to revitalise th past, we had to remain content with traditions—we hac to take for granted what we were told about the Kean and the Macreadys. Whether it was correct and truly representative of the artist no one can gauge. Nor is i a cogent answer to protest: "You accept the lives o great men as chronicled by historians; why shouldn't the same procedure make you well acquainted with the achievements of great actors?" Men of action live by the narrative of their deeds; the actor's achievement is neve concrete, it is abstract. Hence the poet coined the immortal phrase: "Posterity twines no wreaths for the mummer"—in other words, the actor's work dies with him. When he ceases to act—the rest is silence. How then, would I propose to perpetuate memorable histrionic work of to-day? I would reply: By gramophonic records It could be easily done by the powerful companies such as the Columbia and His Master's Voice, if they were to combine in the creation of an Actor's Museum.

It is not a matter of great outlay, but one of selection and perseverance. Whenever a play of importance i produced by leading actors, a representative should be a hand. He should carefully scrutinise as to how far certain scenes are capable of "recording" and how far they are

gnificant of contemporary acting; how far they are orth preserving for times to come. It is by no means n easy task, or one that should be lightly undertaken. first-night verdict generally means nothing—eulogy of rdinary dramatic criticism; not much more. The test whether a performance so deeply impresses the masses, whether lip-to-lip propaganda is so vivid, that in a comaratively short time all the world talks about the actor, ll the world wishes to see him. Such events are few nd far between, but that constitutes their value. To be ble to judge what is ephemeral and what fit to live beyond generation is the crux of the question. This reminds me of an anecdote which bears on the subject. A man f many ideas and more failures once came jubilant into he City and told a dazzling tale of his being promised a undred thousand dollars by an American concern if he ould carry out a contract which he had somehow been ble to arrange at the Vatican, of all places in the world. He was promised that the Pope would deliver an encyclica nto the gramophone. It would make history: it would ppeal to all the millions of Catholics in the world, who would be eager to hear a sacred voice never heard beyond he portals of the Holy See. The promoter created interest nd astonishment; people literally rushed him to death n their eagerness to underwrite shares. Had it come ff it would have been a world-stirring event. But—the ays of mice and men!—just before the oration, the Pope ell ill and died. His successor—so goes the tale—disliked he idea, and of the great mirage nothing remained but a ore disappointment. Had it been otherwise the world f to-day and days to come would have preserved a priceess treasure of unique historical value. It was this same an who, some time after, formed a project to collect peeches of famous Parliamentarians in order to reproduce

them broadcast. Of course his idea was merely com mercial, but it is indirectly to him that I owe my suggestio of the Actors' Museum. I know that on the surface i seems a chimera, and the queries will at once arise—will i pay? and what is the good of such a collection of voice to our contemporaries? Mme. Taussaud was confronte with these questions when she began to immortalise peopl in wax. "Patience; it will come," was her motto, an the Marylebone Road museum is still the Mecca of th young and the visitors to London.

LVI

April 19th, 1924.

"HATS OFF!"

I WISH I knew all the technical terms of a milliner to describe the modern ladies' hats, and to say what I think of them! Being a mere male, and not otherwise much interested in the article, except when called upon to pay for it, I can only protest that I look upon the modish hat as an abomination, and one that hides instead of enhancing the charm of woman. Mind you, I do not abuse the Rubens hat, the toque, and the other dear little things that vacillate on pretty heads. I mean the hat that looks like a soup-toureen or a cooking-pot or pan; the thing that is clapped deep down on the fair wearer's skull and with one fell swoop hides hair and forehead and ears and neck. Once that hat is on, the face loses all character or gains a new and often undesirable one. Some women look stupid, some vampish, some roguish, some like adventuresses in melodrama, who, from underneath the brim, cast furtive glances at the passer-by, trying to observe without being observed. I daresay that the head-pot is an excellent medium for coquetry and covert flirtation; but it is rarely becoming, and generally leads to disfigurement. Its worst aspect is, as I said before, that it obliterates character, and in this respect I have made some studies which seem worth recording.

First of all, in the police-courts. When a woman stands in the dock or the witness-box with all her features, especially the eyes, overshadowed, it is impossible to estimate her

mentality. From his elevated seat the magistrate, from his distant seat the barrister, is not able to penetrate what goes on behind the half-mask that faces him. You can read neither truth nor lie in this overshadowed facial outline, still more dimmed by the twilight atmosphere in court. I remember cases when witnesses gave their evidence with obvious candour; yet, peering at them closely, I perceived that they were committing rank perjury. But those who sat in judgment noticed it not; the hat made that face look bland, unmoved, composed; and, as the voice did not falter—women are greater artists in prevarication than men—there was every semblance of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In other instances I have seen women responding to a charge as if they were unmoved; for the hat obscured the sadness of their eyes, hardened their features, made them seem indifferent to their fate. Yet I, being able to scrutinise them closely from near by, saw rue and sorrow, and the terrible agony of fear. Had they been uncovered they might have moved the magistrate, inclined him to leniency —to the " chance " for which the culprit in her mortification dared not to ask.

I have often discussed this matter with lawyers, and asked why female defendants and witnesses should not be called upon to remove their hats, as well as the men. And the answer was in every case (with a smile) that it could not be done, that there was no precedent for it. In other words, nobody had given it a thought, and maybe the innovation could not be allowed until the Home Secretary had been applied to for sanction, and acceded to it. In my turn I was asked why I was so insistent on the point, and my reply was that, as a critic, I came in frequent contact with actresses; and that, guided by my experiences in court, I made it a rule, whenever a newcomer

came to me for advice and counsel as to her career—after the invitation to take a seat—to proffer the polite request to remove her hat. Sometimes, of course, a quaint look, as if I were asking something weird or indecorous, met my request; and nearly every time, while withdrawing the hat-pins, my visitor would utter the excuse that her hair was so untidy, a protest which I always met with the assurance that untidy hair is preferable to an eclipsing hat.

And, indeed, the procedure, funny as it may seem at the first glance, has resulted in discerning and pleasant surprises. I have interviewed girls who, with their hats on, were plain, and, as soon as they uncovered forehead and locks, were not only quite different beings, but beauties. I have interviewed girls who looked positively unintelligent, and, "hat-off," radiated with *esprit* and buoyancy. I have interviewed girls who under their "cloche" looked like suburban damsels, and uncovered like queens and a Pompadour. I have interviewed girls who with the hat conveyed comedy, and without it, under the dome of their forehead and the undulation of hair, indicated all that makes an emotional actress. And vice versa, the character actress unveiled as a *commédienne* and the seemingly somewhat elderly maiden blossomed forth as an *ingénue*.

It seems odd that a mere hat can produce such magic effect of transformation, but it is the plain unvarnished truth. And I can recollect at least one case when an actress seeking an engagement, and being met by a manager with the polite observation that "he feared she would not look the part," bethought herself of my advice, proposed to take her hat off, and was then and there "fixed up," because the woman without the hat was quite a different being from the one with her light under the bushel.

Since that time, whenever young actresses come to me

and ask for an introduction, I wish them god-speed, with the exhortation: "Now, the first thing that you do when the manager asks you to sit down and give an account of yourself is to ask, with a pretty smile, 'May I take my hat off?' Never mind how he looks at you when you say that; don't wait for 'Why?' or 'Yes'; do it. And ten to one your shares will rise like a boom on the Stock Exchange."

Hats off! is the parole for the women aspirants to the World of the Theatre.

LVII

April 26th, 1924.

DUSE—THE FORTUNE THEATRE—THE "NIBELUNGEN" FILM

Two years ago I saw Duse on the Riviera—a shadow of her former self; still a royal personality, but slightly bent and her features broken with sorrow. She hated that Riviera town: she went through it pluckily, but with "death in her soul." People greeted her with ecstatic enthusiasm, but she found no pleasure in it. She had hoped to live out her life in quietude; then came a fell financial blow, and in her sixties, frail in health, she had to take to touring. A year ago she came to London, and to me her appearance was as painful as Sarah's, when, in the last year of her life, she came to the Prince's Theatre, but not the Bernhardt of old.

Reminiscence obsessed me. I heard the voice as it was in the distance. I saw those lovely hands—that inspired D'Annunzio's "Giocconda"—still beautiful, but now, as it were, strained by age. They still spoke volumes, but volumes of sorrow; the outline remained, but the motion had become different—it is difficult to express how—I can but summarise it in the word "lassitude." And lassitude, too, sounded in her voice. One felt indomitable will-power battling with waning force. She remained great, as great as ever, in silence—the ominous silence that in "Ghosts" described more vividly than words the awful atmosphere of the Alving House. Duse was perhaps not Ibsen's Mrs. Alving. She was the Duse-Alving, the sad

heroine of "Fuoco," that terrible book of D'Annunzio's, in which he flayed the erstwhile woman so well beloved and, so to speak, threw her to the dogs. All the sadness of Duse lay in her Mrs. Alving. Never was a *mater dolorosa* depicted in such sad, heartrending colours. One forgot the actress. One thought of her life, a ruin on a glorious pedestal; of the past, when she held us all by regality, not by pain; of the cruelty of fate that compelled her to toil when her very eyes, those eyes now dim with embers where before glowed flame, betokened that all she cared for was rest—rest and warmth, so much warmth that on that summer's day the playhouse had to be heated to galvanise her life-force. The audience around me was wild with enthusiasm, such as is engendered less by impulse than by tradition-impelling homage. I, for one, could have wept. I felt like sitting by a bedside, watching the supreme effort of one sick unto death. I vowed never to go and see her again. The thought of the gladiator at the mercy of the imperial thumbs obsessed me. The present and the past—the glorious past, when she was all power, all domination, all magnetism springing from an inexhaustible coil—were in woeful conflict.

This was the third experience of the kind: Irving, a few days before he faltered in Becket; Sarah, when she bade us good-bye; now Duse, her spirit yet flickering, her personality a shadow of her former self. And yet she had to wander like the Jew, not for glory, for to that there could be no further increase, but to gather the dollars to make the two ends meet. To die far away—to die in Pittsburg of all places, ye gods!—to be carried home to the blue seas by the "Diulio," never to see them again! What a tragedy! What an end! What is the worth of fame when the final call overtakes a ruler of men in a

strange home away from Home—away from all that is near and dear—in Pittsburg!

* * * * * *

"*Coquet*"—that is the apt but untranslatable description of the new Fortune Theatre. It is a cosy little box, built with an ingenious eye for economy of space. Outside the severity of line hardly conveys the idea of a theatre, but in the hall there is the brightness of marble and gilt, and the auditorium looks comfortable in its uniformity of seats, all upholstered in green leather. The democratic spirit has prevailed in the accommodation: all the seats are of the same dimension, every one of them has a clear view of the stage, and, as far as one could judge, the acoustics are everywhere perfect. So is the ventilation: thanks to the engineers of Sulzer Brothers in Winterthur, fresh air is instantly drawn from space and pumped into the house. There is no fear of stuffiness. The lighting system is the most complete of any theatre in London, with ninety-eight switches all gathered in a little office on the O.P. side. House and stage are under control of a single hand, and, by the Schwabe-Hasait system, it will be possible to create the most variegated atmospheric effects. Another triumph of the economy of space is that the store-house of the scenery and "props" is below the stage, so that all the material can be lifted through a trap in the middle. The dressing-rooms, fifteen in number, are small but comfortable, supplied with hot and cold water and centrally heated. In the upper regions are capital offices—in fine, the equipment is up to date in the best sense of the term.

The Fortune, by its compactness, its close contact between stage and auditorium, will be particularly suited to the fine art of the *Théâtre Intime*, or to that other genre which demands intimacy between player and hearer

—the revue. The colour-scheme of "blue-greys, creams, browns, reds, and old-gold" (I quote) seems a little capricious, but it should not be judged until the reflectors are at work. When all is ship-shape, the little theatre will be a real acquisition, reflecting much credit on the architect, and, particularly, on its originator, Mr. Lawrence Cowen, who devoted so much energy, resource, and liberality to its construction. May the Fortune Theatre live up to the happy auspices of its name.

* * * * * *

Inscribe the name of Fritz Lang on the scroll of great film-producers. His "Nibelungen"—not Wagner's—the simple dramatic tale of the Saga, is a *magnum opus*. It will be a milestone in the film-world. It marks the immense progress of the craft in Germany, for it is closely allied to art. The play lives in the picture. There is rarely a suggestion of artifice. Even Siegfried's fight with the Dragon is as natural as nature. The beast is of the "Zoo," not of the property-chamber. It lives, rages, battles, snorts fuming breath, reels pathetically in anguish, dies in long-drawn spasms of limbs and muscles, sheds the gore that is to render Siegfried invulnerable, in powerful gushes as of veins pierced by the sword.

But Lang's mastery excels in his focus of nature and in his working of crowds. In the latter, he avoids the American method. He does not work with phalanxes, he works with battalions. There is no overwhelming by masses; there is individuality in the troops invading castles, in riders galloping through forests and across mountains. There is plastic grandeur in palaces and churches, and the buildings are ever but a frame; the pictures themselves are alive with characters. We feel the drama; and the story of how Siegfried died for his loyalty to Krimhild and her brother Günther is closely

knit together like a chain. Every unit tells and strengthens the climax. His vistas of nature are marvellous. These forests, these sunlit glades, the ride of Siegfried through the mists, are a rare combination of mysticism and nature. The traveller familiar with Germany recalls his wanderings through the land of the Saga where he peopled the sacred spots with his own imagination.

This film, from a technical point of view too, is strangely stimulating. The Germans have raised photography to the pinnacle of magic. See how Siegfried spirits himself away with the aid of the "Tarn Kappe"; see how the spear transfixes him before our eyes and lingers in his writhing body, till at Günther's feet he breathes his last. What ingenuity! How is it done? How much there is to learn!

Alas! that the women in the cast fell short of the men. Brunnhilde lacked the ominous beauty and the transcendental power of the man-wife; and Krimhild was but a wooden German Fräulein, monumental, but without charm or temperament. The men were all excellent. Paul Richter, of Apollonic build, with a wave of fair hair, with fiery eye and nimble force of sinews, was the true hero of the poem. Hagne was awe-inspiring as the villain with the evil eye; and Günther was the perfect picture of the weak vessel—the lamb in the lion's skin.

The great audience in the Albert Hall greeted the German film with unstinted applause. To the Graham-Wilcox concern our thanks for a perfect evening.

LVIII

May 3rd, 1924.

MOODS

Spending a little while in France, I have again been struck by the great difference between our audiences and those of our neighbours.

Our people go to the theatre in a calm, business-like way, without any outward signs of excitement, without undue haste, with a great sense of order and first-come-first-served. Once inside, they settle down quietly, except when on a first night there are great expectations. There is no trouble with the programme-girls, no argument as to seating—all is in apple-pie order. Coming late is bad form, and generally punished with silent contempt; very rarely the pittites "strafe" with a "tut-tut" or the loud breathing of disapproval. Enthusiasm awakens during the progress of the play. A brave speech, a fine exit, elicits a round of applause, regardless of the fact that it halts the action and spoils the atmosphere. Generally applause at the end of an act, and particularly at the end of a play, is in excess of merit. A Continental critic once aptly said that if one believed in the value of applause one would go away with the idea that nearly every day a new masterpiece is born, or that an actor has risen to greater fame. To-morrow all may be forgotten, but the evening itself marks a high tide of approval. The same critic remarked incidentally that he could not understand why a kiss sometimes earned undue hilarity, or why there was restlessness

in the house when too much was made of "mother" and protestations of filial affection.

To understand these things you must be familiar with the British character—its shyness where manifestations of love are concerned; its sense of individual independence, or the modern relations between parents and children. The British do not object to kissing on the stage—in fact, they like it; nor do they object to the worship of the maternal spirit. It all depends on circumstances—on the "placing" of it; our sense of humour is always lying in ambush, ready to be tickled and to seek outlet. To the French, both lovers' kiss and *ma mère* are sacred things—the kiss so sacred that it is differentiated between a kiss on the mouth (which means everything) and the kiss on the cheek (the accolade), which is nothing more than a handshake or a pat on the back. But *ma mère* hushes the French audience into silence—scenes between mothers and children, even on the screen, readily produce a tear. As Napoleon, himself very fond of his mother, once said to Talma in one of his dressing-room chats with the great tragedian: "A real Frenchman respects but two words—'*Mère*' and '*Mort.*' Whereupon Talma, perfect courtier and diplomatist, gracefully added: "*et Napoleon.*" Of course the Emperor smiled—but in his own dictum there was much truth—the cult of motherhood and of the dead has, if anything, grown since the war mowed away the flower of manhood. By the way, in a little village of some eight hundred souls (Castelar), I saw a tablet containing the names of fallen heroes, and among the twenty-eight there were nine of one family and seven of another!

But to return to the living. As mentioned before, the English go to the theatre in a business-like way; of the French I would say that going to the theatre is a "business"—the business of life in a sense, for the theatre is

part of life in France; but also the business of labour. The people are all excitement before they enter; they become almost ecstatic at the box-office. Everybody is in a hurry; everybody pushes somebody else; the file is unknown; the crush is a sport, and *place aux dames* is but rarely respected. And what an affair it is to get the ticket! The box-office keeper is always overwhelmed; he says that his head reels; he scribbles and searches and he calculates. It is part and parcel of the administration. At last, after much ado, pushing, discussing the merit of the seat, counting of money, the ticket is duly conquered. Now comes the cloak-room: another little upheaval; you don't get served in a "jiffy"; they count your wearing apparel; they strap it up with a numbered string; they hand you a token, and with much trouble you extricate yourself from the throng—to fall into the hands of the *ouvreuse*. That relic of the past does not find your place all at once; there is the formality of comparing your ticket with a plan in her hands—it takes time—and on Sundays in the smaller theatres there is often some confusion; somebody has taken your seat; sparring and sparkling words! At last, *tout s'arrange*—there remains the question of a programme, of a foot-stool, of oranges, chocolates and *dragées* flourished under your nose by another damsel or matron. You are all the time afraid that the curtain may go up while you deal with all these ceremonies. But no need to worry—the hour of starting is an advertising stunt—you are lucky (or unlucky as the case may be) if the curtain rises only fifteen minutes after the scheduled time. Meanwhile the noise and cackle around you is often deafening; the dropping of seats is alternated with the stamping of impatient feet—a pair at first, then a dozen, at length such a "stampede" that behind the curtain a bell begins to tinkle and at last the

first of the three thuds is greeted with an immense "Ah!" of relief.

Then comes the transformation. As soon as the curtain is up, those who have arrived are wrapt in attentive silence. Never mind the late-comers, who dribble in till the first act is nearly over: they may disturb but cannot deflect rapt interest. The play is on—the audience is transported into a new world. Nothing disturbs the stillness. Until the curtain falls there is no outward sign of appreciation—but the silence is eloquent. When the act is over the connoisseur of audiences knows exactly how the wind blows. He reads the temperature of an audience as he reads his thermometer. There is no organisation of calls—an invidious thing all too often—as in our theatres. The reward is distributed all round, not single-handed. Again the connoisseur knows its meaning—whether it is for the play, the ensemble, or an individual.

In France, more than in England, the *entr'acte* is the trial of the play to the players. Our people indulge after the curtain's fall in exclamations of approval or depreciation; in brief sentences; in adjectives such as "charming" and "interesting" and "top-hole," "priceless," or—rot! The average French playgoer, unless he is merely of the digestive order or a *bon bourgeoise* out for the day, shuns such commonplaces. He is truly critical; he expresses blame or praise in analytical discussion, and not until he (or she) has delivered a kind of rhapsodical oration *pro* or *con* does he wind up with "*Superbe*," which is a tower of praise, or "*Moche*," which puts the lid on everything—a brief summarising verdict after a reasoned summing-up. At the end of the performance there are no lengthy demonstrations, no unnecessary speeches; there are other things to look after: a renewed push and crush at the cloak-room, it is now well after midnight; we have been four hours

and more in the theatre, and spent two of them—or a little less—to feed the "buffet" in the interminable *entr'acte*.

Yes, it is a business to go to the theatre in France compared with our easy traffic between eight or eight-thirty and eleven. But then, to us, going to the play is a past-time; to the French it is a rite as ingrained in life as a daybreak Mass after the week's toil.

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